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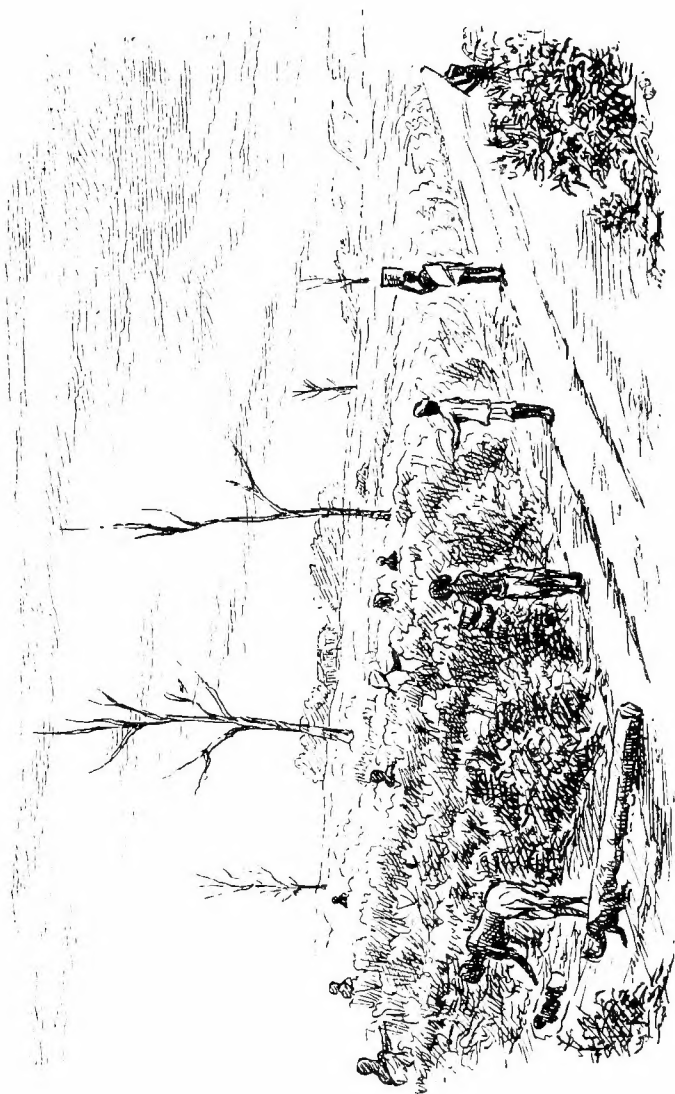
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A tea planter's life in Assam.



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A TEA PLANTER'S LIFE IN ASSAM.



A

TEA PLANTER'S LIFE IN ASSAM.

BY GEORGE M. BARKER.

WITH SEVENTY-FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR.

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1884.

P R E F A C E.

THE great difficulty of procuring information respecting Assam will, I trust, be accepted as a justification for the publication of this little work, in which I shall endeavour to convey, however feebly, some knowledge of this comparatively unknown portion of our Eastern Empire.

There are, doubtless, many intending emigrants who desire to learn something of the country in which they purpose spending some years of their lives, and what may be the probability of acquiring sufficient wealth to enable them to return home with a competence for the remainder of their days. When in such a position myself, my inquiries, addressed to travellers who seemed to know most corners of the world, obtained but meagre replies: "Assam—yes—beastly unhealthy hole; better not go there." Beyond this point their knowledge did not appear to extend. Other sources of information were consulted, but in vain was anything definite looked for. At length an old friend resident in Assam sent me the long-desired information, and this, together with my own subsequent experience, I now hand over to my readers.

Taking into account the very extensive area of the district and its great commercial value to India, it is remarkable how little is known about it in England. The following pages by a rough Planter, which have not the slightest pretension to literary merit, may perhaps be found entertaining as well as useful to all interested in one of India's principal industries, namely, Tea—its planting, growth and manufacture; the strange surroundings, human and animal, of the European resident; the trying climate, and the daily life of the Planter who toils in the jungle far from civilization to provide the civilized with their cheering beverage.

Brynderw, Dolgelly.

October, 1883.

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A TEA PLANTER'S LIFE IN ASSAM.

CHAPTER I.

GENERAL—GOING OUT ON SPECULATION—SALARY—COST OF
LIVING—DRAWBACKS OF THE LIFE—ABSTEMIOUSNESS
NECESSARY—THE JOURNEY OUT—AMUSEMENTS ON THE
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—CALCUTTA.

IN the present days of overcrowding and consequent severe competition for any appointment worth having, a mania has developed for emigration. No matter what his present position or prospects in life may be, every young man imagines that there is a more than probable glorious future, that his social status will be ultimately bettered, if he can only get away from England, and either convert the hundreds that he possesses into a few thousands, or, unaided by capital, carve his way to a competency. These hopes are but occasionally

realised: the difficulties of making rapid fortunes in the Colonies are daily multiplying. Young men emigrate to our several dependencies year after year, full of hope, energy, and health; but too frequently return again, after a sojourn of a few years, penniless and broken in health, their life having been a continued struggle to earn a bare subsistence to keep body and soul together.

To any man thinking of emigrating on the speculative chance of finding something to do, with no certain situation to step into on arriving at his journey's end, my advice is, let him exhaust all his available interests to obtain something to do at home, even though it be but a poorly paid office; then, if everything fail, as a very last resource, leave England. This is my most earnest advice to anyone turning his thoughts towards Assam, especially as a land of promise. It is worse than useless to start off on the chance of finding an occupation; for there is already a surplus of competent men waiting for berths, and all subordinate positions, or nearly all, are filled up by young men, carefully selected on physical grounds, at home, so that there is no chance for men who go out speculatively. Journeying out to Assam to have a look round—a proceeding that can only be resorted to by the capitalist in search of an investment—is not of much use either, unless the intending investor is a man of sound judgment and already knows something about tea. There are few con

cerns that require so much investigation before investing money in, whose figures are more puzzling and difficult to get at, than a going tea plantation.

A *mens sana in corpore sano* is absolutely necessary to resist this dreadful climate: the work is very hard, the sun a terrible enemy; there are many comforts wanting, scarcely any society, and in his daily habits a man has to exercise an enormous amount of self-denial and discretion if he wishes to retain good health. Unfortunately, many in England on the look out for work are carried away by what seems to be a large salary. Tempting offers of billets are occasionally to be seen advertised in the daily papers: one hundred and fifty rupees a month (equivalent, at the present rate of exchange, to about £150 per annum) to commence with, and the additional prospect of a steady increase at the rate of five hundred rupees a year for the first three years. This sounds well, but nothing can be more misguiding than these figures. One hundred and fifty a year to a London clerk seems to be abundant wealth, though among them are many whose yearly bills for education used to exceed that amount, now content to accept far less, and contrive—Providence alone knows how—to marry upon it. In Assam, this amount of pay just enables a man to exist, but that is all. Luxuries, which at home would be classed amongst necessities, are not for him. Famine prices are paid for all English and American tinned pro-

trial to the novice making his initiatory trip, and it is as well, if circumstances permit, to avoid it. Landing in India during the cold season gradually prepares the new arrival for the coming hot weather, and lets him down gently.

The much dreaded and talked-of voyage is after all a miserably prosaic affair; uneventful, with scarcely an incident to break the monotony, except an occasional run on shore at one or other of the places of call. To break the humdrum uniformity of the journey—a sufficiently excusable reason—it is much pleasanter on the first voyage to embark on a ship touching at the various ports *en route*. The expeditions on shore not only give a pretty clear insight into the habits of the people, differences of costume, curious surroundings, and other interesting matters; but after the irksome confinement on ship-board, few but those who have felt the glorious sense of freedom on getting away from such restricted surroundings, even though but for a few hours, can thoroughly understand the sensation. Conversation for the ensuing few days, after a run on shore, is more varied and less wearisome; the doings of each party are recounted for the benefit of those who stayed on board: altogether it makes a very appreciable difference to the liveliness of the passengers. These days of the Suez Canal have discounted travellers' adventures, and reduced the possibility of risk and accident to a minimum. The average old Anglo-Indian, with memories still clinging to him of the

voyage round the Cape, lasting over a period of one hundred days, thinks no more of journeying backwards and forwards between England and India than any ordinary Londoner would of an excursion to Margate by river steamer. The leading companies possess magnificent vessels, beautifully decorated, and fitted up with every imaginable comfort ; their engines are enormous, and as there is a very keen competition just now among the rival companies for the passenger traffic on the Indian and Australian lines, a very high rate of speed has to be maintained, in order to meet the requirements of a quick passage. The average passage lasts from thirty to thirty-five days ; but out of this period some three or four days are consumed in coaling or taking in cargo at the various points of stoppage. The British India Steam Navigation Company possess a splendid fleet of vessels, calling at Malta, Port Said, Suez, Aden, Colombo, Madras, and Calcutta, thus affording an opportunity of seeing a good many places of interest along the route. I went out in one of their vessels, and have seen no cause to regret my choice : everything was thoroughly comfortable and well ordered, the table lavishly kept—no mean auxiliary in helping to break through the dreadful *ennui* of a voyage, when the great point under discussion is how to kill time. The attendance was good, passengers a very pleasant set, and the captain, with whom always rests the power to make a voyage a success, one of the pleasantest and most sociable men that



EGYPTIAN WOMAN.



FEATHER MERCHANT.

it has ever been my good fortune to run across. If it is my fate to go back again, may I find Captain Cosens sitting at the head of his table, spinning yarn after yarn in his old style; then, indeed, will the journey be pleasant. But let us get to the end of our voyage quickly. At all ports

where the ship touches a fleet of small boats rush out and surround her directly the anchor is let go,

each boat bearing its complement of shell merchants, feather merchants, vendors of fruit, jewellery, lace, cigarettes, oranges, dates, photographs, curiosities of natural history, coral, and the thousand and one things produced by each country *en route*. There is a temptation to buy up a collection of these novelties, solely because they are cheap, but they take up an unfair proportion of the already

all-too-circumscribed space in a small cabin, and are perpetually getting in the way. Whenever there is the slightest motion on the ship the carefully-stored-away incumbrances will unexpectedly leave

their corners on the rack over their owner's head and fly about, describing odd tangents off his head and back, rendering it additionally uncomfortable for their unfortunate possessor, whose cup of wretchedness is already full, for the demon *mal-de-mer* has entered into him. A great deal of money is wasted in the purchase of these nick-nacks,—for the most part useless on the way, and broken or spoiled before the return journey is thought of. The box-wallahs (pedlers) who board the vessels, are mostly unprincipled ruffians, men without a conscience, a deficiency that has, however, been made up by a double stock of unblushing effrontery. They will ask for their wares just four times as much as they expect to obtain; arguing and bargaining may reduce their prices to something like a rational figure; but even when, after a long period of wrangling, a bargain has been struck, an uncomfortable feeling will pervade the purchaser and affect him with a strong conviction that the wily native has undoubtedly had the best of the negotiation. The greatest insult that one can offer to any of these fellows is to give him, without demur, the price that he first asks. He feels that his common-sense has been outraged, that he has been much too moderate in his demands, and ought to have asked more. They are an unmitigated nuisance as they swarm over the decks, jostling each other and the passengers,—swearing, smelling, lying, bargaining at one and the same time. The novelty is at first intensely amusing, but this soon wears off. Of these

licensed marauders perhaps the best behaved are the native jugglers and snake-charmers, who come on board at Colombo or Madras, and perform most extraordinary feats with the smallest possible amount of accessories. The chief places of interest on the way are the Church of St. John at Valetta, the Monastery of the Capuchins at the same place, bazaar at Port Said, the tanks of Aden, temple of



SNAKE-CHARMER.

Buddha (containing the celebrated tooth of that divinity) at Kandy, near Colombo. These should certainly be visited if there is time. Those who prefer to remain on board, not caring to take part in such expeditions, will find quite sufficient amusement to occupy their attention in the pertinacity of the merchants, or watching the diving boys. A very considerable proportion of the younger inhabitants of Aden seem to lead an amphibious life, and live on

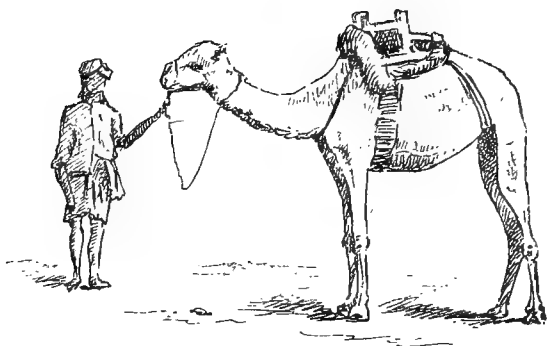
the money that they can secure from passengers on the passing steamers. These young fellows are always good-tempered, cheerful, bright, and full of mischief; their skin is very black, their teeth brilliantly white, hair thick and woolly. With the aid of *chunam* (lime) plastered thickly over the head and left to dry, the naturally black hair is dyed a golden yellow, a form of adornment much in vogue amongst the Somalis, and a sign of personal vanity: the



ADEN BOY.

yellower the hair becomes the better and nearer to the perfect standard of beauty. A black face surrounded by rough curly yellow hair suggests on first acquaintance a *lusus naturæ*, but the extraordinary combination is the only way that they have of showing that they too are susceptible to the dictates of fashion. Their knowledge of English is confined to one sentence: "Have a dive?" "Have a dive?" which they repeat over and over again in a sing-song chorus,

to the accompaniment of sundry well-directed thumps, made by the open hand applied sharply to the hollow of the side. Their little dug-out canoes, on which they dodge round the vessel, are of the most primitive construction, and have to be baled out every two or three minutes. For paddles, any piece of box lid is utilised.



BOY AND CAMEL.

But we must leave Aden, its boys and its camels, and push on to our destination, Calcutta, where our trials by sea are ended. However pleasant the voyage may have been, yet it is with a feeling of intense satisfaction that we go down the ship's side for the last time, carrying away pleasant reminiscences of many kindnesses received at the hands of fellow-passengers (with whom, during our last few minutes together, we have exchanged promises to keep up a correspondence), and to go out again into that great bustling world where one's ideas can expand more easily,

assisted by the congenial magnitude of one's surroundings. The peace, the entire cessation from brain worry, the splendid air, are very enjoyable for a time ; but the stir of life on shore is more suitable and agreeable to the restless activity which everywhere prevails during the present century.

CHAPTER II.

DESCRIPTION OF CALCUTTA—ITS DIRT—HOTELS—SERVANTS—SALAAMS—HORSES AND PONIES—EDEN GARDENS—GLARE IN THE SUNLIGHT—NATIVE WAY OF PASSING TIME—THE PARIAH—THE BEESTIE CONVEYANCES—THE INDIAN BARBER—THE HUBBLE-BUBBLE CARRIER—COCOA-NUT OIL—THE ADJUTANT BIRD—ANTS—RHADA BAZAAR—PURCHASES TO BE MADE—HIRING SERVANTS.

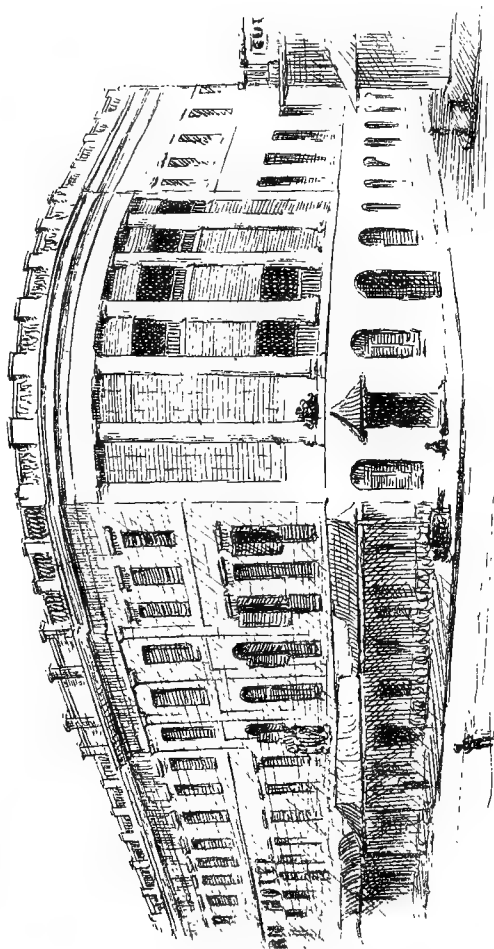
THE passage of the Hoogly safely accomplished, notwithstanding all its dangers of odd currents and multifarious sand-banks springing up in most unsuspected places, than which for us not even Scylla and Charybdis had more terrors for the ancient mariners—here we have arrived at Calcutta. Thank goodness, the miles of slowly steaming by that dreary flat waste of land, which forms the river's banks and stretches from the Sunderbunds to Garden Reach, are things of the past. Visionary horrors dart across a too retentive memory of Saugor Island, an arid tract of desert, that seems at some period to have been cut adrift from the parent Sahara and settled down at the mouth of the Hoogly, for the sole purpose of striking terror into the hearts of all new arrivals, who, full of delight at the near completion of

their voyage, must pass it on their way to Calcutta. Just below the capital, the King of Oude's palace forms a great attraction. Here the badly used old monarch has quietly settled down, after a somewhat troublous time of it, and has converted the palace into a kind of Zoological Gardens ; a hobby, by the way, which helps to dispose of by far the greater portion of his large income. Thousands of his pigeons are to be seen circling around the palace, on whose roof men are constantly at work waving about long bamboo sticks and shouting, in order to frighten them off, and keep them perpetually on the wing.

Calcutta from the river presents an imposing appearance : the Strand, in the foreground, bristling with the masts of countless ships from every corner of the globe, with a background of vast white palaces, their windows decorated with bright green sun-shutters. The dome of the Post Office, a prominent point in the panorama for the eye to rest on, rises high above the surrounding buildings, making one's thoughts fly back to that grand old dome in London. The leading thoroughfares of the town are broad, well kept and watered, but some of the turnings off the main streets are filthy, badly-drained alleys, emitting such odours as to enhance considerably the value of lavender water. All the streets—if they can be considered worthy of the name—in the native quarter of the town are a disgrace to Calcutta and those connected with its municipal administration. They seem

to be entirely guiltless of any attempt at drainage. The huts, or, more correctly speaking, dirty hovels, alongside the street are built according to no plan or principle. The sweet will of the native tenant has caused to be erected a residence that no well-minded pig, having an eye to the first rudiments of sanitation, would take to. It is to be devoutly hoped that some time or another—may the day be not far distant, though probably not until after a few thousands of these people have been swept off by an epidemic, and the English quarter of the town has been threatened—the authorities will proceed to pull down these eye-sores, and replace them with something habitable. But that these places should remain as they do, stagnating in dirt, is very reprehensible, and the moral responsibility of the powers that be in case of an outbreak of infectious disease, would be a burden that I should not envy them.

Calcutta—gigantic city though it is—boasts of only one fairly good hotel, the Great Eastern, carried on by a Company. Here can be bought everything. The premises under the hotel have been fitted up as a vast store, which is kept freshly supplied with the latest English novelties by the continuous stream of ships coming out. The hotel itself is fairly comfortable, the table being kept on a very liberal scale, and the general arrangements as complete as can be expected in a huge establishment of this kind. As there are many extensive boarding establishments in the town, the hotel is mainly used as a place to put up at for a



GREAT EASTERN HOTEL, CALCUTTA.

few days, until some more permanent arrangement can be made with one of the boarding-house keepers, if a lengthened stay is contemplated. Many of the best houses in Chowringhee facing the Maidan, and formerly private mansions, have been converted into boarding-houses to meet the demand for this kind of living.

It is as well on arriving at the hotel to engage a servant to wait at table : there are always several to be found hanging about in the corridors, on the lookout for employment.

The supply of hotel waiters is limited in number, and the delay at dinner, caused by a crowd of eager attendants surrounding the servers is vexing, and not conducive to that calmness of mind which for good digestion is a *sine quâ non*. Especially among the Kitmutgars a warm spirit of rivalry exists to secure each for his own master some choice dainty that has just come straight from the kitchen ; and it is quite a common occurrence for one man to watch his opportunity until another has got his hands full, then snatch and bear off in triumph the coveted dish. They are splendid waiters, quiet in their movements (they cannot make much noise as they walk, for boots are denied them when in attendance), stately in their carriage, very attentive, anticipating each little requirement, anxious to please, and withal decidedly picturesque. These men are usually engaged by the day, for which they get eight annas (about tenpence). Out of this pay they supply their own food. They devote to your service the whole day, from six in the

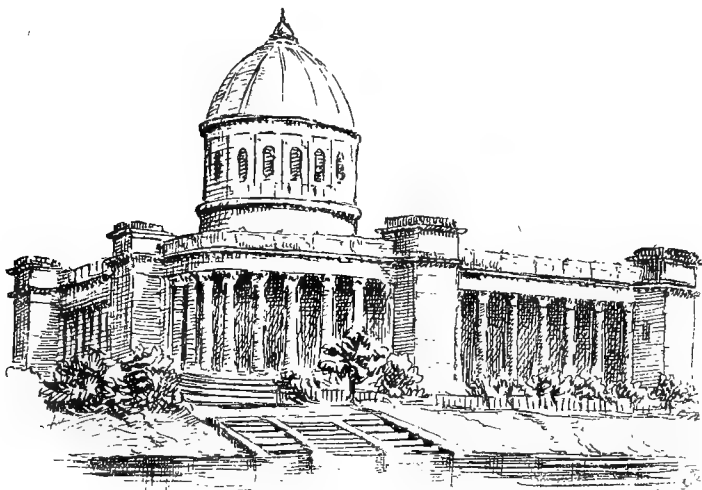
morning, when they bring *chota hazree* to your bedside, until after dinner, about nine o'clock ; then they make their salaams and retire for the night. The salaam is the most marked feature in the difference of greeting as adopted by Eastern and Western custom. The attitude of the hands, placed together before the face, suggests at first sight supplication, but the dignity which ordinarily accompanies the action cannot fail at once to remove the idea. Of course there are salaams and salaams ; the salaam of a native gentleman, or well-to-do merchant, and that of a street box-wallah are two very different things ; the former greets with an air of respectful equality, the latter with cringing servility distasteful to look upon. The view from the hotel window, up and down Council House Street and overlooking the grounds of the Government House, conveys a fair notion of the size and wealth of Calcutta. Long lines of carriages, with magnificent embroidered trappings, the vari-coloured garments worn by their native owners, the cries of the hawker, the screams of the kites, as they lazily flap from house to house, and the bustle of foot-passengers, make the front of the hotel at five o'clock on an afternoon a most



SALAAM.

entertaining and lively spectacle. All the carriages—and their name is legion, for everybody keeps one—are remarkable for one very noticeable falling off. However gorgeous the conveyance and the liveries may be, the horses are invariably a most weedy broken-down looking set of screws. There are more miserable specimens of the equine race in this one town than could be matched throughout all England. They are mostly Walers (a name given to all horses imported from Australia) or country bred : very few English horses find their way out so far. An extensive trade is done with Australia in horse flesh, there being a regular season for sending over large consignments for the periodical sales held in Calcutta. Most are sold at public auction, and command prices ranging from three hundred and fifty to eight hundred rupees : a fair specimen will average about four hundred and fifty on landing, when they are rough and in bad condition. After they have been on shore for some time, and have shaken off the effects of their voyage, their value is much enhanced ; besides, prices rule much higher for an animal when he is acclimatized. Burmah or Pigou ponies are generally used up-country. Ponies have much the best of it over the uneven ground on a tea plantation, and can be more easily handled. Their prices in Calcutta are variable ; but these hardy little fellows command an average of three to four hundred rupees at the sales. I should certainly recommend any man going up-country to take a good pony with him,

especially if one is to be had a bargain. There is always considerable difficulty on arrival up-country in finding an animal with a pretension to pace or soundness; these rather important points are set off against by any amount of vice and defects, that do not, as a rule, tend to make the animal a source of enjoyment to its possessor.



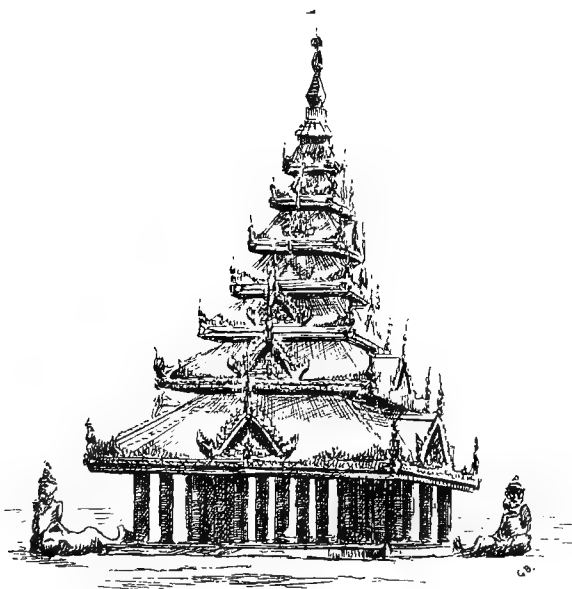
POST OFFICE, CALCUTTA.

The sights of Calcutta can be seen in the three or four days that must be spent there, waiting for linen clothes to be made, and collecting things to take up-country. They are the Government House, the Post Office, the Law Courts, the Seven Tanks, the Maidan and the Eden Gardens. The Seven Tanks lie a short distance out of the town, and boast, as their chief

attraction, some splendid carp, venerable fellows with a dignified mien, who swim slowly and with an apparent weighty sense of their own importance. They are quite tame, and come to be fed at the summons of their attendant. Their age, like that of a lady, is veiled in uncertainty ; but this much is known—that one of them is three hundred years old, and a fine portly old gentleman he is, weighing, I should roughly calculate, over twenty pounds. His antiquity can probably claim a few centuries farther back than he is given credit for ; to him a hundred years more or less must be of but small account. Who shall say that the great Buddha himself has not fraternised with this old relic ?

The Maidan, stretching along by the river, answers the purpose of our Rotten Row. Here everybody is to be seen in the cool of the evening, driving or riding up and down ; and again, before the heat of the day commences, people take their early morning canter. The ground is kept in good order, the grass regularly watered twice a day—how refreshing to the eye is the cool green !—and the roads are conveniently laid down round the grass plot, so as to make the Maidan thoroughly appreciated by both residents and visitors. At the Law Courts end of the Maidan an inclosed portion forms the Eden Gardens, a very happy name for a most charming spot. These gardens are glorious in their wonderful wealth of luxurious vegetation. Here can be seen specimens of almost every tree grown in the tropics. The view of the masses of wavy

feathery-looking leaves, broken here and there by the stiff broad leaf of the plantain, presents a most pleasing sight. The cost of restocking and keeping up this place must amount to no inconsiderable sum per annum; but it is to Calcutta what the parks are to London, and could be ill-spared. In the grounds



PAGODA.

are a lake, a Burmese pagoda—picturesque in its ugliness—winding pathways everywhere, arched over by tangled trees, interlaced with many varicoloured creepers, and a splendid piece of turf laid down for promenade purposes. Each evening this point is lighted up brilliantly, and offers a very

pleasant way of passing a couple of hours before dinner. The regimental or town band meanwhile plays away merrily. Other places of interest, as the Zoological and Botanical Gardens, can be visited by those who have the time to spare.

The intense whiteness of the houses in Calcutta, although of great assistance in helping to keep the temperature low inside, is at first terribly trying to the eyesight, the strain at times being almost unendurable, more particularly when the sun is not quite at its zenith, but throws its rays slantingly. There is no shade in the town, the white walls of the opposite side of the street reflect the heat as well as the glare, rendering the atmosphere like that of an oven, and walking more of an exertion than a pleasure. As midday approaches, the intense heat confines people to the house, exposure to the sun's rays at this time of his strength being injurious and likely to terminate in sunstroke. Even the ever indolent native is affected, and becomes more lazy—if such a thing be possible. As the sun mounts higher, you can watch him growing uneasy (for the rays are falling directly on him), then shift his quarters to a doorway, where he squats down, prepared to sleep until the evening cool comes down to wake him. One of the marvels to the active-minded European is the amount of sitting down, without visible occupation of any sort, that a native can get through during the day. What does he think about? His naturally heavy countenance is no tell-tale of his ponderings,

for he wears an expression of utter vacancy. Is there some deep-laid scheme revolving through his brain, that takes time to evolve, with which some day he will burst upon an astonished world?—or does he nurse discontentedly a feeling that Nature has been unkind to him in not placing him in the world on an equal footing with that sahib who has just passed by, resplendent in all the glory of civilised raiment? My firm conviction is that he thinks of nothing, that his brain never works, that he lazily and stupidly stares at passers-by without a wish or desire for aught. What a picture of contented happiness! By his side, or a short distance from him, lies a friendly pariah; he too will court sleep, and his wooing will not be in vain. Much as I esteem



SQUATTING NATIVE.

the pariah when performing his appointed functions as a scavenger, he is most objectionable when not occupied at his proper business. Like all idlers he gets into mischief, and is frequently discovered under your horse's feet, fast asleep in the middle of the road. Here he lies calmly still until his wretched carcase is jeopardised, waiting to see whether you will not turn to the right or left and leave his slumbers undisturbed; but he is astonish-

ingly nimble in getting out of the way at the very last moment.

At four o'clock in the afternoon the bhistie, equipped with a goat's skin full of water, and slung on his back, commences to water the roads. This he does by jerking in circles the contents of his skin, round the nozzle of which he keeps a tight hand, as he hurries along. The hoses in the main thoroughfares are turned on, all Calcutta begins to wake up, carriages



BHISTIE
(WATER CARRIER.)

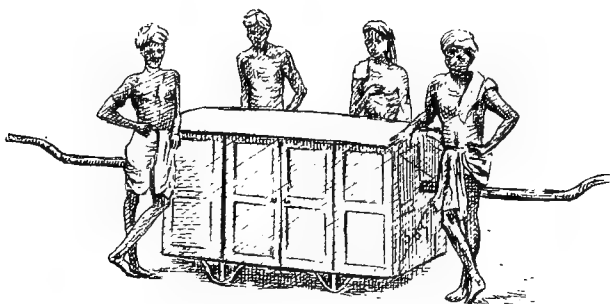


INDIAN BARBER.

roll along, palkee men trot here and there, even the pariah shakes himself together, yawns, stretches, and slowly trots off to select a site, and make arrangements for stealing his next meal.

A choice of two modes of street conveyance can be exercised—either a cab or a palkee: the former a narrow, stuffy one-horse conveyance, with sliding shutters to keep out the heat and dust; the latter a long box, having doors or windows in the centre,

fitted like the cab with sliding shutters. Along the roof a stout pole runs the length of the box and projects four or five feet at each end, where it is slightly curved in order to rest more comfortably on the shoulders of the four men who carry it. The bearers shuffle along at a good round pace, and manage to get over a lot of ground before they are fatigued, meanwhile accompanying their steps with a peculiar humming sound, or chanting an epic in honour



A PALKEE.

of the occupant of the palkee. Throughout the East anything in the shape of hard work is always attended by a most distressing series of noises emitted by the labourer. I do not know whether it is singing, or a relief for superfluous energy; but any way it is cruel on the listener. The disadvantage of the palkee is that, although cheaper than the *gharri* (cab), it has only accommodation for one person, and that one must lie down flat on his back, *nolens volens*.

Another oddity is the Indian barber. Turning

sharply round a street corner the sightseer will several times in the course of a day come upon a couple of men squatting down on their haunches, face to face. In the East there is none of that delicacy of concealment while performing the toilet that we boast of in the West, and so that hidden mystery, the process of shaving, is here conducted, *sub lumine cœli*, in the face of all men. In the course of a morning's walk, hundreds of men in the various stages of being shaved will be seen; for not only is the face submitted to this process, but the head, arms, body, and even legs: the barber's occupation is, therefore, no light one, and it takes a considerable time to get a gentleman finished and turned off entirely to his satisfaction.

The hubble-bubble carrier is another mysterious personage, a wonder amongst many wonders. Watch him as he wends his way down the street, stopping to exchange a few remarks, now with the coachman on the cab stand, and then with some general street-corner loafers, giving them each a pull at his hubble-bubble. I never was able to find out how this man was paid, for no money, visible to the prying eye of the curious, was seen to pass between his clients and himself; yet I cannot think that he was sufficiently well off, or a disinterested philanthropist, to devote the whole of his day to supplying his friends with tobacco (such horrible stuff as it is); and the only solution to the question that I could hit upon was, that he must have had a system of annual or monthly subscriptions paid in advance, like a circulating library.

There are many strange people with stranger modes of obtaining a livelihood to attract attention and excite wonderment on first arriving in India, all of which form a perfect fund of amusement. The reversal of European ways of doing things is especially remarkable. To take a few instances. To remove the hat in England is a sign of respect; in India the boots are removed. Nearly all work is done in what we should consider a back-handed way: the needle is pushed away from the person; the plane is moved from left to right, towards the carpenter; and even the saw is reversed as to its teeth.

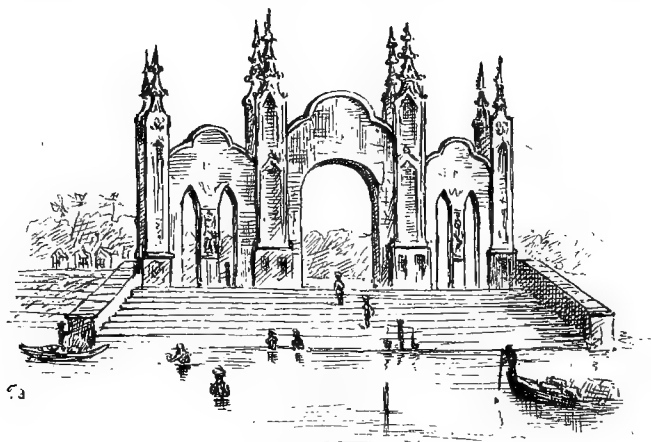
The mode of carrying babies, slung upon the hip or over the mother's shoulder, wrapped in a long cloth, does not strike one as a particularly happy position for the little one, although it has the advantage of allowing the woman the free use of both her hands.

Cocoa-nut oil plays a prominent part in the native toilet. After his bath, which he takes at one of the ghâts on the river, shortly after sunrise or before sunset, he walks home, drying his cloth on the way by the simple expedient of letting it float out behind him as he hurries along; then he goes home and oils



WOMAN WITH BABY.

himself. This it is that makes him so objectionable to the olfactory organs of his white brother. If the native could manage to exist without anointing himself with this vile compound, it is reasonable to conjecture that he would be much dearer to the heart of the white man. As it is, he is an object not to be closely approached, and to be addressed at a distance.



BATHING GHÂT.

The superior class of natives do not use oil ; or if they do, a carefully prepared kind, and less of it.

We must not pass over, without mention, one more curiosity, peculiar to Calcutta, viz., the adjutant bird. On this fellow, with the able assistance of jackals, pariahs, and crows (these latter have justly earned a character for the most consummate impudence) devolves the greater part of the scavenging of the

city. The ludicrous appearance of the adjutant, his lavender-coloured coat, picked out here and there with broad white and black markings, topped by an imbecile-looking head, most of which seems to be beak (giving him a top-heavy effect), the whole finished off by a pair of long spindle legs, is irresistibly comic. The Government House is their headquarters here, until the midday sun drives them to seek shelter. They are to be seen stalking slowly and solemnly round the broad parapet, or standing apart in their favourite attitude, on one leg, and looking knowingly out of one eye. They are so useful in helping to keep the city clean, that an order has been passed prohibiting their capture, and a heavy fine for killing one. They certainly deserve to be preserved, if only on account of their absurd appearance and laughter-provoking powers.

They are splendid fellows at all kinds of offal: nothing is too good or too bad for them; they can eat and digest anything. Many amusing stories are told of their ravenous appetites and capacity for comfortably disposing of the most unlikely articles. The tale still obtains credence how that an enterprising thief of an adjutant, looking down from his lofty elevation, espied a poor box-wallah selling bars of Windsor soap. Awaiting



ADJUTANT BIRD.

an opportunity for a clear flight, this ill-conditioned fowl swooped down, seized his prize, and retired out of reach of missiles to discuss the savoury morsel. Though not quite to his taste, his gluttony got the better of his inclination, and would not allow him to relinquish it ; so, with a pertinacity worthy of a better cause, he tried to like it, and was observed throughout the remainder of the day discomposedly flying about from place to place, throwing off as he went a fine stream of soap lather, but still not finding it in his heart to surrender up his ill-gotten treasure. Another made a light but delectable luncheon off a litter of kittens, all of which he polished off with no semblance of an effort, and without being inconvenienced in the least by their somewhat fluffy exterior. No mortal, up to the present time, has been able to discover what things the adjutant would refuse to swallow on the ground of their being indigestible.

The many Government offices in Calcutta are chiefly and more cheaply conducted by *babus* (native gentlemen) under English management. They are a very difficult class of people to have dealings with, and surround themselves in a mysterious atmosphere of importance, pleasing enough to their own dignity, but detestable to the public. This is especially displayed among the Post Office *babus*, where the term civility is as little understood as it is in a certain London Government office not one hundred miles from the Strand. It does not redound greatly to the honesty of the natives that, when sending a

letter, it is as well—in truth it is a safeguard universally adopted—to cross the stamps with pen and ink, thus spoiling them for any further use, and getting rid of the temptation that may be put in the way of an unscrupulous servant to take off and re-sell them.

Countless disagreeables are attendant on Indian indoor life. One of the most prominently objectionable is the impossibility of leaving any food about. Ants are to the fore among the great drawbacks of life in India; their number in a house is incalculable, for they have reserve forces extending over the whole neighbourhood. Anything and everything edible is agreeable to them. A plate with some small delicacy upon it, left in the middle of the table, becomes, in a quarter of an hour, covered with a moving mass of little black beasts, each tugging away in its own approved direction—a sight in nowise calculated to stimulate a failing appetite. To meet this difficulty, the legs of tables and articles on which food is placed rest in brass cups, which are filled with water, thus rendering it impossible for the ant to crawl up the legs or sides without first risking a watery grave. Precautions must be taken that there is no other communication between the top of the table and the ground, as frequently the edge of the tablecloth, or the end of a ball of string hanging down, will stultify all the most thoughtful arrangements.

A great nuisance in Calcutta is having to write or answer and acknowledge the receipt of *chits* (letters) and parcels. This frequently takes up a good portion

of the morning, but it is the only way of checking dishonesty when parcels of any value are forwarded by the hand of a native carrier.

Before leaving England it is much better to buy all those things that are likely to be required up-country, and take them out (except cotton clothes and camp furniture). The freights for extra baggage are not



KITMUTGAR.

excessive, and prices in Calcutta for all kinds of English goods are high, and when purchases are made in the China Bazaar, where—although the articles may be cheaper than at the shops in the town—the risk of having inferior goods palmed off upon you—especially in the case of tinned provisions, or other articles that are likely to have been kept a long time in stock—is proportionately increased. The China and Rhada Bazaars are well worth a visit, if only as

one of the sights of Calcutta. The narrow, twisting lanes of small shops; the noise made by the shopkeepers in their endeavours to attract attention; the difficulty of fighting a way through a crowd of these shrieking fiends, each flourishing some specimen of his goods, which he thrusts in your face; the absurd gibberish, half English, half Hindustani or Bengali; that they indulge in; the stifling heat and smells; the

Babel of sounds on all sides—sounds that would render a visit to the noisiest of madhouses quiet by comparison—all help to make the impression of a very disagreeable novelty. The denizens of the bazaars have everything English or native for sale, and must be treated in the same way as our friends who came on board the ship to sell their wares—offer them one quarter of the price first demanded, and then probably they will realise a handsome profit on the transaction. This is, undoubtedly, the best quarter for the purchase of camp furniture, white cotton clothes, rezais (a kind of eider-down quilt), and pots and pans to take up-country. Camp furniture is more easily handled and less cumbrous than ordinary furniture in use: the bed folds up compactly, as also the table and washing-stand; the chest of drawers divides into two parts, and can, without unpacking, be easily transported from place to place on an elephant; in fact, all this class of furniture is handy and durable, being made of well-seasoned wood, and can be re-sold at no great loss. Saddlery is best brought out from England.

Before starting from Calcutta, procure at least one servant (a kitmutgar), who will prove invaluable on the travels. If it is possible—and sometimes one is to be obtained—this man should know bearer's work (valet and housemaid combined), besides being able to wait at table, cook if required, and look after his master generally. Sixteen or eighteen rupees a month would not be too much for a good servant

like this. An arrangement is entered into with all servants going up to Assam to stay for one year, as there is great difficulty in inducing them to leave Calcutta and go up at any price. A servant in Calcutta does not earn above one-half the money that he could command in Assam; but there is a prejudice against that country, chiefly arising from a superstitious belief, into which the native mind

has fallen, that the place is peopled with unearthly spirits and devils.

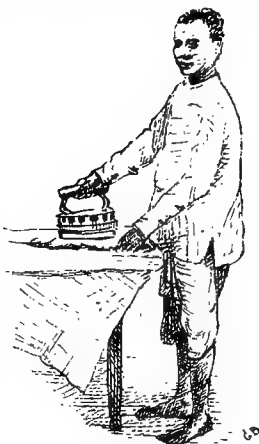


AN AYAH.

A duly signed contract is all the more necessary on account of the distance from the town and expense of having another servant sent up, if the one should fall ill, or were tempted to leave by the offer of larger wages by another sahib—a very unusual proceeding, by the way.

When there is a lady in the party, an ayah, or native maid, might be added to the staff of domestics; but good ayahs are scarce and get large wages. A bad ayah is a terrible nuisance, and will prove an incumbrance. A personal character from some lady in whose service she has recently been is a *sine qua non*. Not unfrequently ladies leaving for England bring their ayahs down with them as far as Calcutta, where they can

be picked up. A dhobie, or washerman (all the washing in India is done by the male sex) is sometimes a necessary evil. This, however, depends on the distance that separates the tea gardens, and the neighbourly feeling that exists in the district. Sometimes one planter will keep a dhobie who can do washing for one or two neighbours—an agreeable arrangement, and one that saves an increase to the already too large stock of servants—if it can be entered into, is much better for all parties. All the servants' characters must be well inquired into, as the Bazaar supplies written characters to native servants at so much a piece, according to the length of the manuscript or the number of lies contained therein.



A DHOBIE

CHAPTER III.

LEAVING CALCUTTA — DIFFERENT ROUTES — GOALUNDO —
FIRST IMPRESSIONS ON SEEING A RIVER STEAMER—JUTE
SCENERY ON THE WAY—SAND-STORMS—DANGERS OF
NAVIGATION — PILOTS — THE RAINS AND THE COLD
WEATHER—SIGHTS—THE RIVER AS A HEALTH RESORT—
GOALPARA AND GOWHATTY—BAZAARS—CHANGE OF MOS-
QUITOES—FISHERMEN—THE JUNGLE.

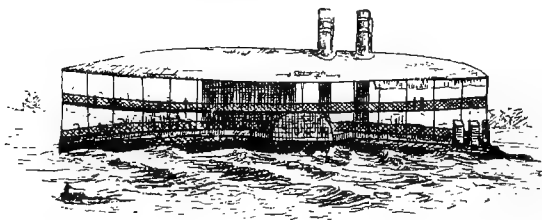
LEAVING Calcutta from the Sealdah Station, and travelling by the Eastern Bengal Railway, the distance to Goalundo is easily accomplished in eight or nine hours ; but the line is so badly laid, the rattle caused by the train passing over the shaky wooden bridges so terrible, and the cars so stuffy, that journeying by this line is an adventure not to be too lightly undertaken. It is, however, the best and ordinarily adopted route, though there is an alternative selection of two other ways : either to embark on board the steamer at Calcutta, and go down the Hoogly, round through the Sunderbunds, so into the river Brahmapootra ; or to travel by train right through to Dhubri, a long dusty journey, lasting forty hours, broken by many changes, with only the hazardous chance of, if lucky enough, just catching the steamer when arrived there. The route *vid*

Goalundo saves about a week on board; the Dhubri route, ten or eleven days. But taking into consideration the trials and vexations of the long railway journey, the Goalundo route is by far the pleasanter and cheaper. If the intending visitor should happen to be in no hurry, the longer route from Calcutta by river would be most enjoyable; for though the scenery of the Sunderbunds has not a single interesting feature to recommend it—the whole district is as flat, sandy, jungly, inhospitable a spot as could well be imagined—yet there is a pleasurable excitement to be obtained in watching the skilful handling of the steamer through narrow twists and bends in the river, which in many places is shallow and difficult of navigation.

Goalundo itself is, considering its importance, an unpretentious enough place, made up of a collection of small huts stuck up on the banks at the point of junction between the rivers Ganges and Brahmapootra. Here is the terminus of the Eastern Bengal Railway; and seemingly, as one might think on arrival at the benighted place, the confines of the whole civilised world. The habitations are of the crudest description, and sparsely scattered over the district, there being but few men unfortunate enough to have their lives cast in such an undesirable locality. The important feature in the place is the dâk-bungalow, or hotel, as its proprietor prefers to style it. The inhabitants are frequently flooded out, a somewhat unhappy order of circumstances to which continual recurrence has reconciled them; and twice in the course of the

year they are obliged to shift their residences, according as it is the dry or rainy season, when the river falls or rises tremendously. Under these extraordinarily variable conditions no sane man thinks of building a good bungalow, for half the year it would be without a tenant. Trains run twice a day between Goalundo and Calcutta for passenger traffic. All first-class carriages on this line are fitted with sleeping bunks in double tiers, overhead and below, similar to a cabin on board-ship ; but the travelling is so rough that at night it is impossible to get to sleep, the noise and jar from the vibration banishing all thoughts of slumber, or rest in any way. Between Calcutta and Goalundo the whole stretch of country is flat and uninteresting, but at night the journey is made picturesque by the fireflies, which are more numerous in this one spot than I have seen them elsewhere in India. One could almost imagine this to be the residential headquarters of every firefly in the universe. Even during the cold season the width of the river at Goalundo is considerable, a huge volume of water flowing by at a rapid rate ; but the colour here near the junction of the streams, on account of the disturbing effect of their collision, is muddy, and the swirling current presents an oily, uninviting surface. Large hauls of fish are frequently taken off this spot or a little higher up, and this has created a trade between the natives and Calcutta ; besides fish, mud turtles, a filthy feeding animal, of no use for culinary purposes, are also found in prodigious quantities.

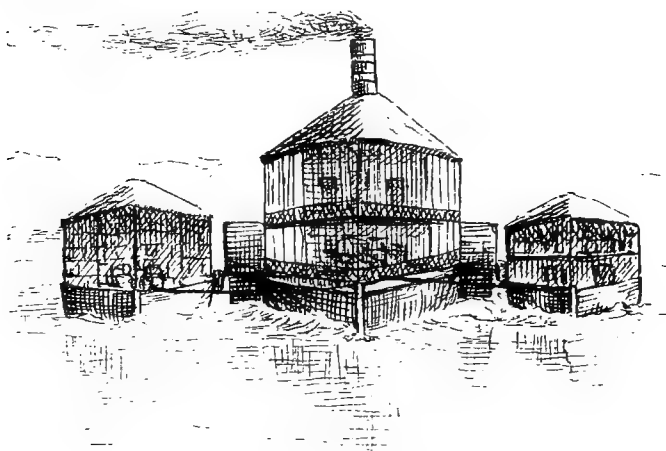
An army of coolies ply round the railway station as light porters, and facilitate, by their roughly proffered assistance, speedy disembarkation from the train and transhipment of luggage to the steamer. What an odd ill-shaped looking affair a river steamboat is when first viewed from the banks! A huge black and white mass of floating wood and iron work, she looks all top saloon deck and chimney stacks. The first idea that uncomfortably creeps over one is how easy it would be for her to turn upside down, there is such a vast amount of material above water.



RIVER STEAMER.

All the vessels are constructed with paddle engines, in order to draw as little water as possible. In consequence of their great length and shallow proportions, the deck is built slightly convex, sloping up from the head and stern towards the centre, a formation that does not add to their personal attractiveness, but strengthens them in the weakest point, for the purposes of cargo carrying. The upper saloon deck (forward) of the vessel, reserved for first class-passengers, is comfortably fitted up with cabins and dining-

saloon, the after part of the upper deck being set apart for coolies or other native passengers. A thick roof consisting of either corrugated iron, or bamboos thatched over, runs the whole length of the upper deck, for a protection against sun or bad weather. Cargo, coal, stores, cook-house, pens for sheep, fowls, etc., to be used on the journey, are accommodated on the lower deck, a part seldom visited by the dwellers



RIVER STEAMER WITH FLATS.

above, on account of the general dirt and disorder that prevail.

Each steamer tows up one or two flats (the number depending on the amount of cargo expected), lashed to her sides by strong hawsers and wire cables. The flats are built somewhat like the steamer, without chimney stacks, are rather more bluff in the bows,

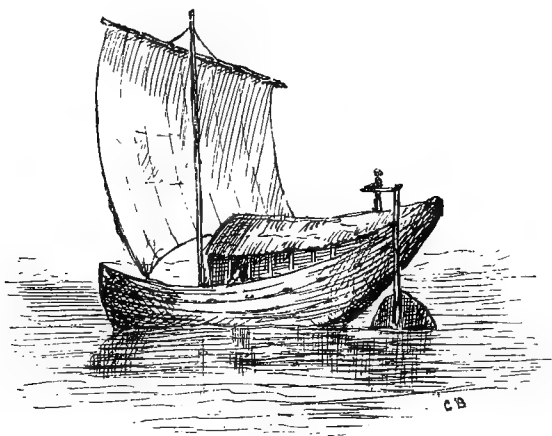
and if possible more ugly and unwieldly. The appearance presented and the amount of room taken up by a river steamer with her accompanying flats is stupendous.

Two companies run a regular line of steamers up and down the river, between Dibrooghur (the farthest point up the river to which the service extends) and Calcutta. This rivalry is very necessary and of great convenience to the planters, ensuring as it does regularity—so far as the river itself allows—speedier transit, and a fixed price for cargo, the rates being much lower now than in the former days of monopoly. The India General Steam Navigation Company and the River Steam Navigation Company are as regular in their services as circumstances will permit ; but the last-mentioned company boasts larger, more powerful and better appointed vessels for the passenger traffic (this in 1881), and will finally (at present there are many difficulties to be surmounted) be in as good a position as their rivals—a position, let me add, to which they are justly entitled. A general assortment of the *necessariæ vitæ* for the use of planters or civilians at the stations, goods sent up from Calcutta or direct from England, compose the usual cargo on the way up river. On the journey down the vessels are heavily laden with tea, but if it does not happen to be the season for shipping, the complement is made up with seeds and jute. Trade in jute between Serajgung and Goalundo has assumed enormous proportions, and is every year increasing. Large

round bales of this most bulky commodity, tightly compressed, are carefully stowed on the flat, when there is accommodation for them, and taken down to Goalundo, where the railway people receive and place them in specially constructed iron vans, provided by the company for the conveyance of the curiously shaped drums. Great precautions have to be adopted to prevent jute catching fire, as it is a terribly dry, inflammable material, and once in a blaze, no effort could save the flat on which it happened from utter destruction. Every care is exercised when handling it, and few captains of flats, ardent admirers of the nicotian weed though they may be, indulge in a pipe while there is any jute above hatches, the knowledge of the risk that they run being a pretty certain preventive.

Between Goalundo and Dhubri the scenery is terribly monotonous. Nothing breaks the line of the long low-lying banks of sand that confine the Brahmapootra, only here and there an occasional patch of vegetation crops up, a beauty spot on the interminable flatness of the landscape, and around these oases are collected a few wooden huts, occupied by fishermen. This portion of the journey takes between four and five days, and for intense monotony could only be equalled by an expedition into the great Sahara. At rare intervals a native trading boat, built with enormously high poop, but very much down by the head, floats lazily by, her sails flapping against the mast in very weariness from waiting for a breeze. The sailing

powers of these crafts, when wind and current are in their favour, is astonishingly good ; for seeing the enormous display of hull that appears above water, and the general clumsiness of the build, one would certainly expect to see them heel right over at the suggestion of a breeze. Some of them are rudely decorated over the stern boards and round the prow with wood carvings, executed by the Burmese,



TRADING BOAT.

along whose shores these vessels do most of their trading ; but the usual type of native boat is roughly though effectively put together, not one *pice* wasted anywhere in needless decorative trumperies. The poop, which extends almost as far as the mainmast, is roofed over with twisted jungle grass. On this stands the steersman, guiding the vessel by means of a

high rudder, lashed on to one side of the vessel, looking more like a lee-board than a rudder. The gigantic size of this, absurd as it may appear, is absolutely requisite, otherwise no steerage way could be got on a tubby unballasted boat floating down with the stream.

Hereabouts it is no unusual event, when a strong wind springs up, to be caught in a sand-storm ; but there is, under ordinary circumstances, sufficient warning given to make all ready for the reception of this most unpleasant of Eastern nuisances. The cloud of whirling sand can be seen careering along at a distance of three or four miles, but it approaches at such a tremendous pace that it is as well to have the cabin doors shut and everything covered up as soon as possible after first catching sight of it. The sand is so comminuted that it penetrates into the hair, up the nose, down the collar of the neck, fills one's mouth, hairbrushes, the very key-holes of port-manteau locks, and will even insinuate itself under the lid of a tightly shut-up dressing-case. During the storm the greatest personal inconvenience is felt in breathing ; eyes smart, inflamed by the incessant peppering that they undergo. Happily it seldom lasts long. Some time has to be spent after the storm has passed over in getting quit of accumulations of sand left by the visitor in corners of cabins and all over the vessel.

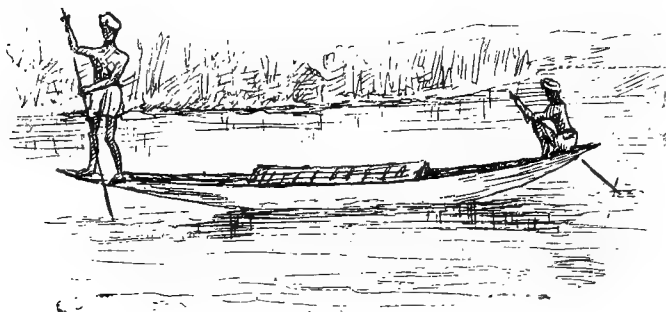
Above Dhubri the scenery rapidly assumes a pleasant change : the banks are no longer of grey

sand, but green grass ; the Himalayas, forming a grand background to the vast expanse of level territory lying between the river and the foot of the first outlying spur of hills, are seen in the distance, towering range beyond range, with countless magnificent peaks clad in perpetual snow. Dhubri is now regarded as the boundary point to the province of Assam. The station is one of rapidly-increasing importance, that will every day be augmented by the new railway route opened between Calcutta and Dhubri; and the superior facilities afforded for getting rapidly backwards and forwards must have before long a marked influence on the prosperity of both the little town and the whole province. Life on board the river steamer, after passing this station, continues monotonous ; the scenery improves a little, and is better than that which we have had to look upon since the start ; but there is nothing attractively striking, and one is again driven back to a never-failing source of interest and amusement—viz., studying the manners and customs of the natives.

During the cold season dense fogs hang close down over the surface of the river, thereby adding greatly to the trouble of the already difficult navigation. Sometimes these fogs are so heavy that the steamer cannot proceed on her way until twelve or one o'clock, by which time the sun has generally asserted his supremacy and dispersed the enemy. On a dark night it is impossible to make any way ; and even with a bright moonlight to illuminate the channel, the

risk is extremely great; so each evening at sundown the anchor is let go, the fires are lowered, and the vessel is made all comfortable for the night. At first peep of daylight the anchor is heaved up, amidst a fearful din caused by escaping steam, rattling cables, and yelling Lascars, and a start is made. The chief difficulty in navigating the Brahmapootra arises from the shifting nature of its bed. Month by month perpetual changes are being worked out; huge banks of sand in the centre of the river are submerged and disappear, only to reappear in a totally unlooked-for locality. The process of silting up or wearing away proceeds rapidly in this sandy soil, and a channel that is navigable to-day will in two or three days' time be utterly impassable. With all these difficulties to contend against, the fact can be readily appreciated that the navigation of a large steamer and two flats, notwithstanding that the extreme draft of water is rarely more than five feet, is not one of the easiest businesses. The river is divided into various sections or lengths, each of which has to furnish a supply of pilots for the steamer service. These men (Assamese) come off to the steamers, whose arrival they await on some dreary sand-bank, in their small dug-outs, and are taken up to the end of their allotted district, where they are landed, and remain for the next returning steamboat. Even under these conditions, with everyday practical experience and constant renewal of the bearings, it is difficult for them to keep thoroughly posted up in the rise, fall, and sudden shifts of the river.

A pilot's life is not one of unmixed blessing, full of pleasure and without a care. Frequently kept waiting on the banks of the river, for two or three days at a time when the steamer is late, exposed to all kinds of weather, uncertain of the date when he may see his home again—the chief excitement in his life is the jump from vessel to shore when his piloting has been concluded. Often to avoid delay through stopping the engines, or when the river is running



A DUG-OUT.

rapidly, the vessel is put as close in to the banks as allowable, on to which he scrambles with all that he possesses in the shape of wardrobe tied up in a handkerchief. Sometimes missing his footing, he has to put up with a good ducking; or, as occasionally happens, sucked under by the treacherous back currents, he disappears altogether, and the district is one pilot the poorer. By such an one life cannot be esteemed thoroughly enjoyable, and it is no wonder that the teaching of fearlessness

of death must be the chief source of consolation in their religion. Should they happen, through bad piloting, to run the vessel on a sand-bank, a *mauvais quart-d'heure* will assuredly ensue. A leadsman is constantly stationed forward at the stem of the vessel, where he stands on a board, let down over the side to form a small platform, to call out at intervals of about a minute the depth of water. The regularity of his voice is excessively monotonous to the passengers on board, and has a distinctly somnific effect. When the water begins to get shoal, and the leadsman's cry comes back as rapidly as he can ply the lead, the pilot's face is a marvellous study of kaleidoscopic changes ; each record of shallower water finds a reflection in his lengthened visage, and his eyes wander furtively round in the captain's direction. Meanwhile faster goes the lead : suddenly a silence ; no depth is called ; then a bump, a creaking straining noise, a sharp crack, a rebound, and away floats the flat down stream, having parted company with the steamer. At the same moment that these events are taking place, the pilot argues, out of considerable practical experience, that he had better not remain in the immediate vicinity of the captain, so retires speedily, until the storm has blown over ; for the average river captain is very mortal, of quick impulses, and fails to realise the enjoyment of being stuck high and dry on a sand-bank. It must take these men many years of careful observation to be

able to calculate, as they generally can, the possibility of working the steamer through certain passages at different periods of the year.

Boats sent away from the steamer to embark cargo



BOAT SWAMPED.

are careful not to row too closely to the banks, which have a disagreeable knack of tumbling into the river at unexpected moments, and swamping everything

within reach of their fall. This is especially observable at the end of the rainy season, when the river is getting lower ; large slabs weighing many tons suddenly slide down without any previous warning. The difference in appearance of the banks during the rains and cold weather is so marked that no person travelling at the two seasons would imagine it to be the same river. During the cold season the river settles down into one channel, up which all steamers must go ; during the rains, according to the amount of water that has fallen, and the advanced state of the season, the surrounding country is submerged, the river at some places stretching away to a breadth of four or five miles. Stations that, during the cold weather, cannot be reached after landing without a three or four mile drive, are suddenly brought into a prominent position on the banks of the river, and find themselves easy of access, quite in the world. The rapidity of the rise and fall is remarkable after a heavy downpour. It has been known during one night to cause the river to rise nine feet. I am not at all certain whether this has not been exceeded by a still larger record. During the period when the river is falling, just after the rains and before the cold weather has set in, is a very dangerous time for those living near the banks : the jungle and herbage that have been under water for four or five months commence drying up, throwing off during the process a terrible effluvium that begets the worst form of jungle fever. Besides the decayed vegetation, fish

are left high and dry on the land; dead bodies of buffalo and animals that have been drowned during the floods and carried away by the stream are left to rot. The revolting custom that exists amongst the Hindus of disposing of their dead by throwing them into the river, has only its simplicity to recommend it; nor is it a pleasing sight, while looking over the side of a steamer, watching the oily surface of the Brahmapootra as it whirls by in large eddying rings, to see a corpse slowly spinning round and round on its way down the stream. The first shock of this kind that we experienced was at Gowhatty, where the thing had grounded and was in possession of a crowd of vultures and pariah dogs, fighting over the choice morsel. Surely if the relatives of the late lamented had seen this hideous spectacle, they would have made up their minds to atone for any want of respect that there had been in this instance, and that the next of their party that went over to the great majority should receive better treatment at their hands. I don't know whether it is an immutable caste law that orders the depositing of their dead in the river, but it is a practice which ought to receive some attention at the hands of those concerned in the sanitary condition of all sacred rivers, and the well-being of the general community in India.

The innumerable sand-banks that just peep up out of the water are, during the heat of the day, tenanted by alligators and turtles, two phlegmatically constituted animals, that repose amicably side by side.

The former offer an irresistibly tempting shot from a passing steamer; but every year they are growing more wary and keep a sharper look-out. Lying stretched along the sand, they look so exactly like the trunk of a tree, that it is not until a bullet has been put in their vicinity that the question of their identity is solved, as, with a sudden switch round of their long tails, they glide off into the water. Bullets do not seem to do them any injury; and one will carry away in his carcase as much lead as would make a fair-



ALLIGATOR AND TURTLE.

sized cannon ball. Under such conditions, killing an alligator is an accomplishment to be proud of. To take, when the opportunity presents itself, a passing shot at wild buffalo as they come down in herds to drink is another way on the tedious journey up river of testing the steadiness of hand and eye. Do not let my reader imagine that these are indiscriminate, unmeaning attempts to murder for the love of killing. Not at all: the flesh of the buffalo makes a capital addition to the table. There is a great danger,

however, of shooting a tame buffalo. The distinction between wild and tame at a distance is in no way marked, and the latter animal being a valuable beast of burden, a fine of eighty rupees is inflicted on the would-be sportsman who is unlucky enough to make such a mistake.

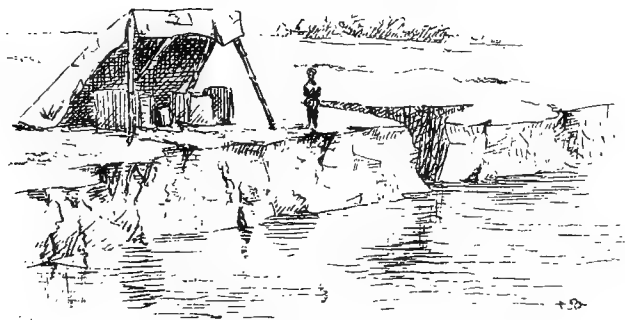
Tame buffalo conceal a very intelligent nature under their rough and somewhat mangy exterior. Once, while our party were awaiting the arrival of a steamer coming down the river, wanting something wherewith to occupy our minds, we became interested in watching the behaviour of a herd of buffalo belonging to a neighbouring village, and remarked that each morning, at about six o'clock, the whole herd swam across the river from the opposite side, the bull considerably in advance leading the way, followed by the matrons, with their calves by their sides. Entering the water about half a mile farther up on the opposite bank, the strong current washed them down to the village where they wished to land—as judicious a calculation of distance and power of the current as could have been made by the most able mathematician. The river at this point was fully half a mile broad, but as there was better feeding ground on the other bank, the animals preferred the swim. After they had reached the bank safely there was a halt for a few minutes to rest and recover breath. Afterwards they proceeded to the village, where they were milked, and again left to follow the bent of their inclinations, an opportunity of which they availed

themselves to proceed slowly up the bank of the river, grazing as they went, for a mile or so ; then again taking to the river, re-crossed to their old ground. It was a pleasing sight to watch the natural anxiety of each matron for her *batcha* (young one) towards the end of the swim, when they were beginning to tire ; the repeated turn of the head to see how the youngster was getting on, and the satisfaction when at length, wearied with the long journey, the little one rested its head on its mother's broad hind-quarters for support.

The river is much frequented as a health resort. No better remedy can be prescribed for an invalid just recovering from an attack of fever, or who has been laid on his back by any of the many ills to which flesh is heir in this country, than a few days spent in this way. The air is bracing, and an occasional breeze springs up (an event almost unknown on shore) after the sun has disappeared below the horizon. Besides, there is perfect rest and absolute cessation from worldly cares : nothing to do except eat and drowse ; not too severe tasks even for an over-worked planter.

In the line of country between Goalpara and Gowhatty the scenery begins to improve on both sides of the river : beautiful masses of foliage line the shores and come right down to the water's edge ; the flatness is relieved by frequent hills ; and how delightful it is for the eye, after the perpetual hard line of sandy levels below Dhubri, to rest on an unevenness on the earth's surface clothed with beautiful bright green vegetation !

During the cold season, the points of call for the stations below Dhubri are scarcely discernible, all that is visible on the banks being a few bamboos stuck in the ground, with an apology for thatch, or a worthless worn-out old tarpaulin thrown over to form a roof, the whole rigged up roughly, as a point where cargo must be stowed after it is landed. This is rolled down planks over the ship's side, and deposited there. Sometimes an official is on the spot to re-



LANDING-PLACE FOR CARGO—DRY SEASON.

ceive the goods ; at other times they have to look after themselves : but as jackals and vultures are the only inhabitants of the district, there is not much fear of their being missing. A sand-storm will upset all previous calculations, and render the chance of recovering the goods rather remote by blowing the bamboo arrangement into the river, and covering over the cargo with a layer of sand two or three feet deep, so that when the owners come to claim their pro-

perty there is some considerable difficulty in finding out the place where the go-down was formerly located.

Goalpara is beautifully situated on the side of a low hill facing towards the Himalayas. The character of the scenery is somewhat similar to the lowlands of Scotland. At a point between Goalpara and Gowhatty, the traditional boundary of Assam used to be marked in the river by two rocky islands suddenly rising in mid-stream. These were euphoni-ously called the Gates of Hell. It can only be accepted suppositionally, there being no authority who substantiates the idea that this opprobrious ap-pellation was given by a people who knew their own country best, and were not afraid to call a spade a spade.

Gowhatty has a similar situation and like beautiful surroundings to Goalpara, on the south bank of the river. It is the most important station of Assam—the term capital is almost admissible—and is the nearest point of disembarkation for Shillong, the hill station. The last-named place is kept lively by the regiment quartered there, and is also the headquarters of the Chief Commissioner, and can be reached by “tonga” in a couple of days.

The scenery round Gowhatty is most charming. A large number of the hills are studded with the tea-bush, the bright green of whose leaves, covering the hills in regular lines, like a chess-board, forms a happy contrast to the naturally more sombre tones of the surrounding greens. There is a large bazaar, and

the visitor should not go away until he has seen the temples, built of red brick, with their wonderfully carved figures in alto-relievo, and quaintly-shaped gods chipped out of the face of the solid rock. Peacock Island, sacred to the bird whose name it bears—to whom it is a refuge from molestation (enforced by heavy fines)—possesses a well-preserved specimen of a Buddhist temple; but there are many such scattered over Assam. The island is in mid-stream opposite



PEACOCK ISLAND.

Gowhatty, and on it live a few old priests, who preserve the temple from desecration, collect all the backsheesh that they can cajole out of each visitor, and look after the one or two birds that are left; although, judging by the wild way in which they started up on our approach, I should think that they were well able to take care of themselves.

Another interesting object is the Hill of the

Thousand Virgins (a number that has recently been allowed to diminish), about two miles walk from Gowhatty, or Gauhati, as it is now ordained that it shall be spelt. The river winds about at the foot of the hills in a picturesque way, and this stage of the journey will be found decidedly the most pleasing. After this the flat country, with its unvarying monotony, again intervenes between the Himalayas

on one side and the Garrow and Naga Hills on the other.



A KYAH (BAZAAR MERCHANT).

Bazaars are a novelty to the European just arrived in India; but the bazaars of the stations are particularly amusing and cheerful. The stations being few and far between, all trade from the surrounding neighbourhood gravitates towards these centres. The

wealthiest portions of the bazaar population are the kyahs, most of them dealers in brass wares, or money-changers. They deserve their success, for they work hard, are very abstemious, do not touch any kind of meat, but live entirely on fish and vegetables. Their only failing—which they share with all people whose lot is cast in this quarter of the globe—is an inveterate liking for the hubble-bubble and opium, and over their consumption they will pass many unprofitable

hours. Steaming up river from Gowhatty the succeeding stations are similar, but on a considerably smaller scale. Perhaps the prettiest is Tezpore, with its accumulation of gigantic squares of carefully-cut stone, strewn all about the little place, beautiful relics of an ancient temple whose foundation-stone was never destined to be laid.

At Mungeldye, on the arrival of the steamer, the natives came down loaded up with geese, chickens, turkeys, eggs, pigeons (ten for a rupee), shaddocks, vegetables of all kinds, lemons, plantains, and other native fruits, and made quite an impromptu market along the edge of the banks. Prodigious noise over the bargaining (for without an excited altercation between buyer and seller that seems to be fast tending towards fisticuffs, a bargain would be but a poor business) was the chief characteristic of this entertainment.

When the vessel is near shore for a sufficient length of time to allow of it, the Hindus on board leave the ship, collect a few sticks, and boil sufficient rice and curry to last over two or three days, it being against the laws of their caste to prepare food for their own consumption on board.

As we get higher up the river, so does the mosquito begin to make his unwelcome presence felt. These brutes—a species entirely distinct from the Calcutta members of the fraternity, being fully twice their size, and possessed of a sting that must have, at the lowest computation, four times their penetrating powers—have earned a bad reputation for blood

thirstiness, and the amiable faculty of depriving the wretched traveller of many an hour's well-earned rest.

The mookhs (a name bestowed on the mouths of rivers at the point where they empty themselves into the Brahmapootra) are the favourite positions for stationing the floating flats that are used as landing points, and here the mosquito rejoices and grows fat. Old travellers on the river dread a long stay at Dunserai mookh, for of this place they relate how the mosquitos are so eager for blood and full of low cunning, that they can be seen, by the ordinary observer, pushing each other through the holes of the mosquito curtains. This may be only a libel, and I cannot vouch for its accuracy; but it is an easily demonstrated fact, and one that is, unhappily, for ever too palpable, that if there should, by some dire chance, happen to be the smallest tear in the muslin, these villains will find their way in. Well out in mid-stream is the only place of refuge: there the pest seldom ventures, fearful of losing his valuable life by drowning. It is a happy night when the anchor is let go right away from the shore, for thereby the possibilities of a good night's rest are much increased. A crafty few that have been hiding down in the engine-room or among the cargo, biding their time, will come up, and frantically hurl themselves against the curtain, buzzing imprecations of a terribly sanguinary character, and woe betide the luckless sleeper who, unconsciously stretching out an arm during the night, leaves it close to the curtain!

A large proportion of the population of Assam live close to the river, and support themselves and their families by fishing. This they do in a very primitive way. Two men will start off in a dug-out (native boat cut out of the trunk of one tree), and paddle along close to the banks, meanwhile keeping a sharp look-out for fish. One man, with a long paddle, stands and steers at the extreme end, balancing himself on a small piece of wood, some two or three inches in width, that tapers off the ends of the boat (for stem and stern are made alike); the other, the fisherman, catches up the net in folds, arranged so that it will, when thrown, spread quickly open without kinking. Directly there is a chance of catching two or three fish at a haul, round whirls the net, and leaving the thrower's hand, opens out as it falls, without a splash, flat on the water; a wonderful knack that must be difficult of accomplishment.

Probably the most curious representatives of the fishing class are the old women, who are to be seen near every station, standing up to their waists in water, armed with a weapon very much like an ordinary small-sized shrimping net. This they put down into the water in front of them, retaining hold of the pole with both hands. Thus they stand perfectly motionless, and hopelessly suggestive of nothing better to do. At intervals of five or ten minutes, or when they feel actively disposed, the net is brought up to the surface with varying success, but they rarely succeed in ensnaring anything bigger than two

inches long. We were immensely amused at first, watching one of the ancient parties ; for it is always some dirty, ugly, wrinkled old hag, fit for no better occupation ; but at length her boundless patience wore out our own, and we left her, thinking that any one who could frivola away her time in such an industrious fashion, and with such astonishingly meagre results deserved, well deserved, all the fish that she caught—



AN OLD WOMAN FISHING.

any way not too bountiful a reward. Doubtlessly these people pass through life enjoying a mere existence: perhaps the poorness of their food, rice and fish, or vegetable curry, would not sustain any such strain as would result to their constitutions from the effect of a little mild excitement.

The vastness of the jungle thoroughly imbues itself on the mind of a traveller going up the river for the first time, and I doubt whether any other place could

be selected which affords such opportunities for reflection and for realising the terrible wildness and desolation of this boundless wilderness. Above Tezpore mile succeeds mile without sign of human habitation, or even an occasional fisherman's hut, to show that life is capable of being sustained here. As far as the eye can reach a low fringe of jungle skirts the top of the banks ; this, on closer inspection,



JUNGLE ON FIRE.

is seen to rise a height of fifteen to twenty feet, dense and impenetrable, except to the wild beasts that make it their abode. "Inhospitable" is a word lacking sufficient strength to convey the awful dreariness and loneliness of this gigantic waste. When on fire, viewed from the river, the jungle presents a wondrous sight never to be forgotten ; the sound at a

distance, as of a strong wind blowing through the trees, heralds the approaching conflagration: it is the noise of huge sheets of flame as they roar and crackle along, consuming the dried undergrowth. Over all hangs a long low-lying cloud of smoke, moving away slowly in the same direction as the advancing fire, and growing denser with the ever-increasing volume of flame. Jungle-burning arises sometimes, from spontaneous combustion, or some other unaccountable cause, and is also practised by planters or natives when they wish to make a clearance for a plantation, this being the most expeditious method of removing the tangled vegetation; at the same time the burnt grass proves a useful, if not over-powerful, substitute for manure. Unquestionably it is well worth while to leave England with all its comforts if only to catch one sight of the jungle, in order to realise the meaning of this otherwise vague term—to see it in all its magnificent vastness, and so to form some slight conception of the immensity of Nature's handiwork.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NAGA EXPEDITION—IMPOSSIBILITY OF PROCURING ANYTHING EXCEPT FROM CALCUTTA—MY LANDING—ANT HILLS—DIMENSIONS OF ASSAM—THIBET—THE ASSAMESE AND OPIUM-EATING—PRODUCTS OF THE COUNTRY—RELIGION—THE GOSSAIN—THE RYOT—WOMEN'S WORK—WHERE DO THE FISH COME FROM?—THE BETEL-NUT—SUPERSTITIONS—MY WIFE'S RECEPTION—SPORT—GARDEN WORK.

FOR the benefit of those of my readers who are ignorant of the whereabouts of the Nagas, I must premise by saying that they are a warlike hill tribe, peopling the range of hills which form the southern boundary of the Assam Valley. The last Naga Expedition (1879-80) had a disturbing effect on the communications between Calcutta and the planters. Both of the steamboat companies were requisitioned for Government service, and every steamer that came up was laden with commissariat or military stores. During this time very few of the civilians' stores found their way up the river; those that did were badly treated. What difficulties the wretched planters had to put up with during this fearful period, arising from the uncertainty of

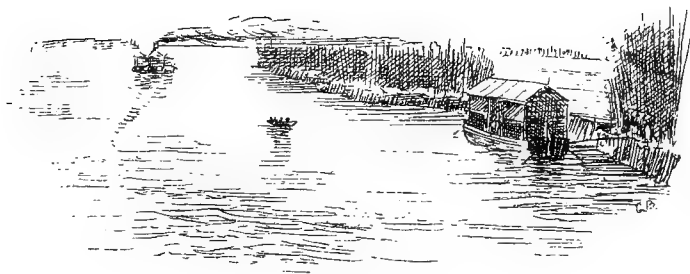
supplies and consequent deprivation of the absolute necessities of life that had been reckoned upon! Even when the orders had been executed and the packages brought up the river, the trouble of obtaining advices as to their whereabouts made this a memorable time for the unlucky fraternity. What has now become of the ship-loads of waggons, horses, field necessities, tons of stores, representing a huge waste of public money, I do not know; probably left for the white ant, or until they may be wanted for another hill expedition. In this event, according to the reports that have reached the plains from the recently disturbed districts, they will not be kept long waiting. It is to be hoped that when another scrimmage—a mere question of time—takes place, the planters, who would be well able with a little assistance to manage an affair of this kind at about one-tenth of the former cost, will be taken into the Government confidence, or entrusted with the total extermination of the Nagas. The mismanagement of the last expedition caused a heavy loss to them by the withdrawal of elephants to Government service, animals which at the time were indispensable in many ways, especially for garden work. I hear that the elephants have since been valued at a ridiculously low price, in order that the expense incurred by the deaths of some of these wretched animals when on the march may be reduced as much as possible, and so not to materially increase the already too long bill that had to be sent in for this pottering little affair. There

seems to have existed in the official mind a belief that an elephant could carry as much baggage as could be piled upon him, and that a regular supply of rice or other food was quite uncalled for.

The impossibility of rapid communication renders Assam anything but a charming place of residence. All the lesser stations or villages in the province boast a desultory, unenterprising race of native merchants, whose stores contain everything that is not wanted, and but few things that are. The stock-in-trade of any one of these gentlemen seemed to me always to consist of an assortment of the year before last's articles, that had been ineffectually offered in London shops, and being considerably damaged or out of fashion, had become unsaleable at home, and were thereupon shipped to such out-of-the-way places as Assam, where no one is in a position to gauge what is fashionable. A country like this must be a splendid *dernier resort* to the manufacturer with a surplus stock. Native shopkeepers have in stock a few marmalades and jams, all of an indifferent description, bearing unknown labels and brands; but these do not go off as rapidly as their owner could wish, and while awaiting a purchaser accumulate some magnificent developments of fungous growth. One article, Bryant and May's matches, can always be procured in any quantity. A few enterprising planters have combined to start stores at one or two of the chief stations, which supply a deficiency long felt, and are well supported by the community.

What Assam must have been twenty years ago, before the country was opened up, it is impossible to imagine. The telegraph is doing wonders in facilitating communication and consequent forwarding of all business negotiations.

My first landing in Assam recalled vividly the description of Eden in Dickens' "Martin Chuzzlewit." As it is impossible to improve on that graphic and powerful description, let it stand as it is, for Eden



OUR LANDING FLAT.

writing Assam, and accepting the whole account with one slight qualification, that Assam is rather worse than Eden. The intense flatness of the country is heart-breaking, and makes it intolerable as you ride or drive about the place ; not a hill anywhere nearer than the Naga range, unless you have the good luck to be located close to the hills where gardens are few in number. Mile after mile stretches flatly away, and the monotony of the straight line remains unbroken except by trees and small wart-like mounds on the

earth's surface, that spring up in goodly numbers—ant hills. These edifices grow to an abnormal size, five or six feet high, and must contain millions of these wretched little pests. The exact number will never be ascertained, for no sufficiently conscientious lover of animals and their ways has yet been found to count the habitants of one of these abodes of abominations.

The whole district of Upper Assam seems at some period to have been covered by the waters of the Brahmapootra. There is no possible reason, seeing how that this river continues year by year to scoop out for itself new channels, why it should not, in past time, have flowed some thirty or forty miles from its present site, and gone over the whole of the intervening country since. The soil in the valley is all of a very rich alluvial character, producing crops with wonderful rapidity. The dense luxuriance of jungle bears constant witness to the powerful vegetative properties of the ground on which it stands.

The total length of the valley from end to end is nearly 400 miles, extending from Sudiya on the east away down to Dhubri; but by river this distance is immensely increased by the innumerable bends and twists. On the north the valley is shut in by the Bhotan Hills, a low outlying spur of the Himalayas; on the south the Naga and Garrow Hills separate Assam from Cachar. Beyond Sudiya is the termination of Assam territory, and beyond that, mystery. It is a matter for much wonderment, knowing how close Sudiya is to Thibet, with the advantage of a

large river connecting the two, that nothing is known of this curious country ; for not even by hearsay, or through native sources—usually prolific enough—can any information be procured of that much-talked-of potentate, the Grand Llama. Permission to pass over the border is invariably refused, and the adventurous spirit starts off to penetrate into Thibet with a pretty certain consciousness that he will be eventually numbered with the missing. Some fine day the Indian and Chinese governments will awaken to the fact—everybody else who knows anything of the two countries has done so long since—that it would be greatly to their mutual advantage to have more rapid communication. Then Thibet will be opened up ; and, armed with a Cook's tourist ticket, we shall be enabled to see what dread mysteries have been previously withheld from us. Most probably the Thibetans are a much maligned and most deserving set of people, retiring in their nature, unwilling to share their country with other people, but preferring their old-fashioned, barbarous notions to the charms of a civilisation, which they neither understand nor appreciate.

Many years ago, the Burmese made an incursion and overran Assam, carrying off a large proportion of the female population. To judge by the intense ugliness of the present race, it is probable that the Burmese were men of taste, and selected only the beauties of the valley, leaving their plainer sisters to raise up a generation that is unsurpassed for hideousness. Far be it from me to utter a single reproach

against the beauty of the opposite sex in any corner of the world: it is, therefore, with a sense of relief that I tell how omniscient Nature has balanced affairs by making the plain looks of the ladies comparatively beautiful when they are placed beside their better halves. In colour they are much lighter than the Bengalis, with eyes shaped on the same curves as those of the inhabitants of the Flowery Land, their limbs are rounder and plumper, and altogether they are a finer race than the rest of the natives of India, except the hill tribes. Betel-nut chewing is carried on to an enormous extent. So long as these people will keep their mouths closed, you can forgive them their ill-favoured appearance ; but directly there is any cause to start a conversation, it is indeed a trying ordeal to have to pass through. Constant chewing this hard nut files the points of the teeth down, and makes them short square little blocks of ivory, and of a brick-dusty red colour. An Assamese with his mouth open conjures up visions of Dante's entrance to the infernal regions. They add another charm to the long interesting list of their peculiarities : they chew opium. The results of this terrible drug on the system have been so often spoken of that it is useless to dwell at length upon its effects ; suffice it to say that a more enervating medicine could not have been found in the whole pharmacopœia wherewith to abuse the human system. Under its influence some men can work very much better for a short time ; on others the stimulating result is not noticed, but they become

heavy and bereft of all powers of enjoying life ; on all the after-effect is exactly the same, and death speedily claims the too ardent votary of this pernicious stuff.

They are not a martial race, preferring to be left quietly to pursue their own humdrum mode of life to the hazardous chances of glory in the field ; and when the Burmese made a descent upon them, they (the Burmese) had matters very much their own way. I don't think that the country has ever quite recovered from the effects of this raid ; the population still continues small and very thinly scattered. Assamese are especially phlegmatic, and not easily upset, and are all more or less amphibious to meet the requirements of the country. If Nature had not providently so arranged this little matter there would have been no population at all.

The hills that form the southern boundary are rich in minerals ; recently discovered coal-fields are being worked, and there is every probability of the opening up of this comparatively new industry to the general welfare of the province, and the increase of communication between the North-Eastern district and stations down river. It only wants this business to be established as far down as Gowhatty to complete the chain of rapid travelling, for the Dhubri railway service has been supplemented by a boat running frequently between Gowhatty and Dhubri. Prices of coal brought up from Calcutta were naturally exorbitant, the large space that it occupied on board the steamers making the charge for freight high.

A small quantity of gold is found in the beds of

mountain streams, and is carried down with the rush of water into the plains. The natives adopt a particularly simple yet effective method of collecting the particles. They sew together and spread the fleece of sheep across a narrow portion of the stream, in which they arrest all small atoms floating down ; this is afterwards burnt, and the gold picked out from the ashes. In some of the streams sufficient quantities of gold used to be found to make it worth the owner's while to hire a man to constantly watch the fleece, and so prevent any casual passer-by from picking it up and reaping its golden benefits.

An intense love of finery is inherent in the breasts of both men and women in Assam, and great is their delight at the sight of a piece of the auriferous metal. They are denied the luxury of a gold coinage (the old gold Mohur being a thing of the past : a curiosity that commands a fanciful price nowadays). The system amongst the heathens of converting capital into jewellery is very handy, and does away with all those fears that affect us civilised beings for the safety of money invested in a company that does not quite realise our expectations, although encouraged by the prospectus of a hopeful promoter. The poorer Assamese are contented with large silver bangles ; but it is particularly noticeable how few of them there are that have not a gold ornament of some description.



ASSAMESE HEAD
WITH RINGS.

Nearly all are good Brahmins, very careful of the sacred rings or other religious symbols, which they wear slung round their necks, and which can easily be mistaken for any ordinary piece of jewellery. A good Brahmin avoids contact with the unregenerate white man for fear of his touching these religious insignia. Should he be defiled, a Brahmin's distress is tremendous, and many are the pigeons and goats, according to the length of his purse, that he would sacrifice; much money also would pass from him into possession of the Gossain ere he could be accepted an uncontaminated Brahmin again. The power of the Gossain, a very high caste Brahmin, always a man of importance and wealth, over the people is extraordinary; his word is paramount; and no right-minded co-religionist would think of questioning his decisions. This is a powerful factor that has to be reckoned upon if he happens to live in the neighbourhood of your garden, for if anything should cause him to be offended, and he wills it that no eggs, chickens, ducks, milk, rice, etc., should be sold by the people of his district, there would be no alternative but for the object of his displeasure to starve: therefore by all means keep on friendly terms with this tyrannical despot. He will probably, as a token of goodwill, send in from time to time a small present of dead pigeons or fruit: this must be punctiliously returned, only taking another and more valuable form. The chief products of Assam are tea, sugar-cane, rice, Indian corn, and

indiarubber. The last-named is brought down by the hill tribes to exchange for salt, tobacco, opium, etc.; but negotiations for a barter are often abruptly terminated by the discovery of a cheap form of adulteration that makes it necessary to be careful in dealing with these gentry,—an unbusiness-like trick that they have of secreting a large stone in the centre of a lump of rubber in order to increase both weight and size.

In this enlightened country every man is his own master. Each Assamese occupies a small plot of land which he, with the assistance of his family, cultivates, and the life of a ryot, or small land-owner, is inconceivably and supremely happy. He owes allegiance to no man (save the afore-mentioned gentleman, the Gossain), he works when he likes and how he likes; there are no new-fangled notions to bother him, and if the weather is propitious and he can get a fair crop of rice, sufficient in quantity to last him through the year, he is perfectly contented. He tills the same ground with the same pre-historic plough that far-back generations of his ancestors did before him. Is not this a picture of perfect beatitude? Money is of no account to him, for his surplus crop will more than supply him with the few luxuries that he may require. Amongst luxuries he does not include a heavy tailor's bill; in truth, this would probably amount at the outside to one rupee a year. His chief indulgences are opium-taking, or hubble-bubble smoking, both highly intellectual

recreations. After the day's work is finished he can speedily reduce himself to a fuddled state with either one or the other : then contentment is his. Can any one reasonably expect that this true-born freeman, upon whom Nature has set the seal of perfect independence, will work for the planters on their gardens? Saving money has no charm nor any object for him: why should he work and lay up stores of rupees for those that come after him, another



NATIVE WITH
HUBBLE-BUBBLE.

race of gentlemen like himself? While there is a sufficiency of rice, salt, and vegetables to eat, a bit of opium or the hubble-bubble in the house, he is happy, and cares not for the future.

A ryot's land is laid out in little square patches, and at a distance the cultivated part of the country appears like a large chess-board. Each patch is "bounded up" all round with muddy earth to regulate the supply of water in each little square. In his farming operations the ryot is ably assisted by his wife, who, after her spouse has ploughed up the mud with a couple of oxen or buffalo (if he is a man of wealth), and raked it down into something like a state of flatness, proceeds to dibble the young rice in with her fingers, planting each shoot four or five inches apart, and working along at a prodigious pace. In

the autumn the paddy (rice) fields present a beautiful golden tint that recalls the cornfields of the old country.

Labour is divided unequally between men and women here. The weaker sex uncomplainingly do the harder share ; for when the women are not assisting in farming operations, they are attending to the cooking of the dinner, or out catching it. By a mysterious dispensation of Providence it frequently rains fishes in Assam, not immense specimens certainly, but still large enough to make them fully representative of the piscine race. A dry hollow by the roadside, after a night's rainfall, will be found full of water : this result the average intellect would expect ; but in the puddle many little fishes from one to three inches long will be seen disporting themselves, and where they came from and how they got there is a zoological conundrum. These the thrifty housewife turns to good account, and starting off early in the morning, she will spend the whole day paddling about in the water, using her net as shrimpers do. On her return home the fishes are cleaned and curried against the time of her lord's return.

Notwithstanding the terrible nature of the climate, these people are very hardy, and with the exception of a death from spleen, fever, or elephantiasis, one does not hear of much illness amongst them. Even they, however, though to the country born, cannot escape from or resist the terrible malarious fever which is so fatal to the European. Three-fifths of the population



ELEPHANTIASIS.

NATIVE SUFFERING
FROM SPLEEN.

suffer from an enlargement of the spleen. Although this gives them a very comical appearance, it appears rarely in any way to affect their bodily health: one or two deaths resulting from such an universal disease represent a small percentage on the mortality lists. This unsightly complaint is the after-effect occasioned by frequent attacks of malaria, and does not confine itself entirely to the native. Sometimes, but happily unfrequently, it seizes on the white man. He is able on account of his stronger constitution or better living to resist, and finally, by a trip to England, get quit of the enemy. A continued diet of rice, fish, or vegetable curry, has scarcely enough strengthening properties to enable the native to throw off the after-effects of bad malarious fever; add to this a constitution undermined by the abuse of opium or betel-nut chewing, or hubble-

bubble sucking, and there is simply nothing to prevent this or any other disease from sweeping off thousands of the wretched poor-blooded people. And yet there are men to be found who advocate the use of the betel-nut (what abuses have not their apologists?), declaring that it promotes digestion and in no way impairs the general well-being. Can it be wondered at that a virulent epidemic breaking out amongst a collection of men like these, unnerved and debilitated by the excessive use of narcotics, cannot be resisted, but has everything its own way, sweeping off all who fall foul of it, finally ceasing because a whole district has been decimated or nearly depopulated.

The Naga Hill men used to work for the gardens adjoining their districts, but since our little differences with them they keep well out of the way. In colour of skin they are lighter than the Assamese, in disposition much more active. Heavy weights are carried in a basket slung on their backs, supported by a band passing round the forehead, on which the whole weight is thrown. This way of carrying weights is a heavy strain on the muscles of the neck, and in



NAGA WOMAN.

consequence the Nagas are unusually well developed in that part of their frame. On the march, in single file, they give vent to an extraordinary series of grunts at each step, and a planter has not much difficulty in being made aware of their close proximity if they are passing through his garden.

One planter that I met, accompanied by another Englishman, had penetrated across the Naga Hills into Burmah (the only two Europeans, I believe, who have safely accomplished this hazardous journey), and had found no necessity to carry a single rupee; the whole of the carriers' pay was in opium, of which they had, before starting, secured a plentiful supply. Through the same medium, opium payments, they found every facility for procuring food and all other requirements. Unlike the Assamese, the people are of a bellicose nature, and in the recent disturbances gave our men considerable trouble; their rapid marches, unencumbered by heavy baggage, presence of mind, and power of appreciating difficult situations in which to entangle our troops, and thorough knowledge of the ground, served them in good stead of long-ranged rifles. The Government have since bought up their arms at £5 a piece, and there are queer stories told of the trouble the Nagas went to in order to scrape together from every corner of their country all kinds of ancient weapons, long before laid aside as useless, that could with reason be called a gun, so as to satisfy the desire of Government to get hold of every firearm, and at the same time gratify

their own little weakness, not alone peculiar to these people, of procuring a good sum for a worthless article. Since this extraordinary proceeding, there is every probability of a renewal of the trouble ; in fact, already ominous signs are not wanting.* In the next expedition up into their country we shall find them armed with a vastly superior weapon, and in every way, after their practical experiences of late, better prepared to meet us on equal terms.

Superstition prevails everywhere in the East, and curious jumbles of fact and fiction are now and again circulated, which manage to travel at a great rate, in a more or less mangled form, for distances of two or three thousand miles. Many of the odd rumours can be traced to the priests, who start a story for their own purposes. "*Fama volat*" under exactly similar circumstances to those that it did in the time of the Latin poet, and bearers of important tidings are not one whit more reliable or less prone to exaggerate now than then. Conversations or reports from bazaars are carried from station to station ; news of any sort passes quickly from mouth to mouth.

I remember, on the sudden death of a planter in our district, a letter was sent off to the dead man's friend, forty miles distant. A few days after this gentleman rode in and told us that his own servant had given him the first intelligence at his breakfast the morning before the letter had reached him. There was no kind of direct communication between the

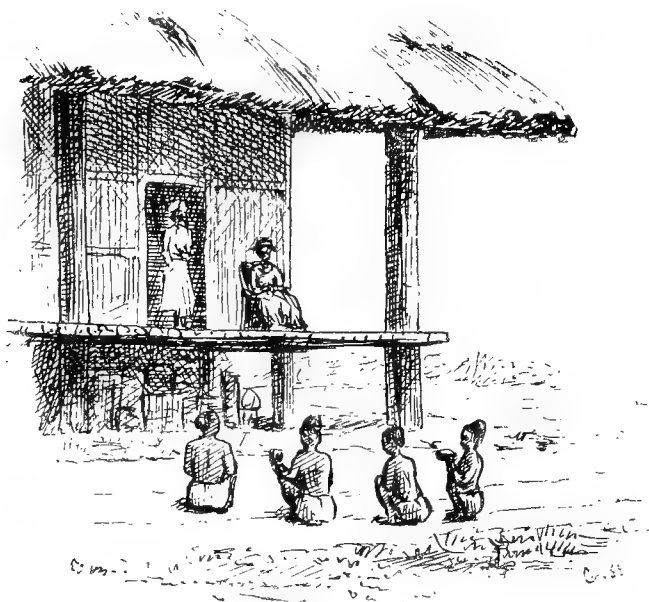
* Since the above was written there have been renewed disturbances.

two places ; so that to convey the intelligence with such speed would have puzzled Hermes himself.

Strange anecdotes are circulated concerning the superstitious rites performed by the natives over newly-born infants and their dead—tales for whose accuracy I cannot vouch, but they were told me in all good faith, and I see no reason whatever that they should be doubted, considering the many other curious religious observances that are practised in this out-of-the-way corner of the universe. One story runs on the method of testing the hardiness of a baby by plastering it over with mud shortly after its birth, and placing it out in the open air to dry. If the little thing comes through the ordeal safely, they say that it will be a hardy man and live to a good old age ; if it succumbs (I never got any statistics showing the percentage of these), it is as well out of the world, for it could only have been a weakly man. Another yarn is told of the felicitous means adopted for getting rid of ancient grandams or grandfathers, who, having nearly run their allotted course, and being of no further possible use either to themselves or their descendants, are gently conducted down to the river-side—the river is always selected for religious ceremonies of an imposing kind—there bound hand and foot, and left with mouth and nose stuffed full of mud. Needless to remark their sufferings are not prolonged. There are many other stories of a much more revolting description ; but even such as these are not calculated to arouse in

the breast of the white man any great affection for the people amongst whom he is compelled to spend some few years of his life.

The Assamese are, like all Eastern nations, of a very curious disposition, almost amounting to inquisitiveness : not impertinent, but a seeking-after-cause-



MY WIFE'S LEVÉE.

and-effect form of inquisitiveness. Prompted by this feeling, when we first arrived, my wife was a source of considerable wonderment and interest to the villagers round about. The news soon spread that a white mem-sahib was in the neighbourhood, and as this was

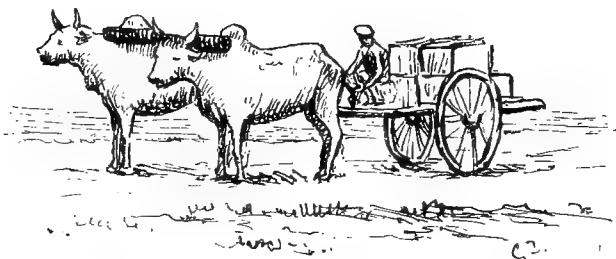
the first opportunity that they had ever had of seeing a white woman, some few seized the occasion to take a holiday and make a day of it. On waking up one morning and going out on to the verandah, my eyes were greeted with an unusual sight—a deputation, composed exclusively of ladies somewhat scantily attired. Each carried a large fruit, or a leaf containing some hidden treasure. They were squatting round in a circle in front of the bungalow, their eyes fixed on the door by which I had just come out. I was naturally flattered at what, at first sight, seemed a just recognition of my many merits; but my vanity received a rude shock when my friend informed me that it was my wife, not me, that they had come to see. In course of time she came out, and was duly presented with the hidden treasures, a few eggs, some prepared rice, mangoes, and various quaintly-formed fruits, names unknown, in return distributing largess in the shape of rupees—a form of beneficence greatly appreciated by these people. After the giving and receiving of presents had been amicably brought to a conclusion, our lady visitors subsided into a squat again, made themselves comfortable, fixed their gaze steadily on my wife, who was deeply absorbed in some needlework, and made it evident that they had no intention of removing for the remainder of that day. This *séance* must have gone on for about four or five hours, interrupted occasionally by my wife going inside the bungalow for a short time; and it was not till after tiffin that, finding the sun getting hot on their backs,

and no chance of again beholding the mem-sahib, who had retired for a siesta, they reluctantly took their leave.

This is the last remaining district where any sort of respect is shown for the Europeans; in all other parts of India the black man is as good as the white, a fact that is speedily brought home to a new comer. It is here, in Assam, that nearly all the old rights of servility that were exacted by Europeans in the days of the East India Company, are still in existence, and flourish to the general better feeling amongst the whole community. Here no heavy babu swaggers past with his umbrella up, jostling you on the way; but with courtly mien, on seeing your pony coming along, furls up the umbrella, steps on one side, and salutes with a profound salaam. A mounted native will dismount until the white man has passed by, and drivers of a conveyance will turn off to one side; but this gives rise to a difficulty in the case of the road being narrow and the sahib's buggy wide, a difficulty that is surmounted by the simple expedient of turning the cart off the road. If the block occurs, as it frequently does, on a raised road, with a steep embankment on either side and a paddy field at the bottom, the result is disastrous. It is pretty certain that the ghari will break away and career into the most sticky spot, have to be unloaded and dragged to the top, by persuasively twisting the tails of the bullocks, and then reloaded; but the dignity of a sahib must be maintained, no matter at what incon-

venience to the native. This method of driving bullocks by twisting their tails is universally adopted throughout India, and has only one thing to recommend its simplicity; the result attained. The sufferings the poor brute must endure before its tail arrives at the state in which it is commonly to be seen, knotted in great twists all the way up, sometimes, indeed, wrenched off close to the stump, must be awful.

An Assamese's stolidity is not proof against a sudden advent of wild animals in his vicinity; and if



TICCA GHARI.

there is a motive power in existence calculated to excite and arouse a native to action, it is the rumour that a barg (tiger) has been seen about. This will instil into him that amount of activity which Nature seems grudgingly to have withheld. On receiving news of the arrival of this unwelcome visitor, a native will at once come up to the sahib's bungalow—the same sahib that he has often slighted, and for whom he flatly refuses to work—and solicit help and protection, either by borrowing guns, powder and bullets,

wherewith to carry out his murderous intentions, or if he mistrusts the accuracy of his aim, asking the sahib to go out and shoot the creature. When thrown on their own resources, and no sahib to rely on, they adopt a very simple but expedient method of despatching the brute. Having previously worked their prey into the end of a belt of jungle, where the open country extends on three sides beyond, which the tiger cannot endure, a net is stretched across the narrowest and least wooded spot, some quarter of a mile farther back. Starting from the outside of the jungle, the huntsmen skirt along in a line with the beaters, driving in the direction of the net, and by dint of much shouting and tom-tom thumping, force their enemy to retreat before them. Men are stationed at either side of the net who drive the brute into it, at the same time whipping the ends round to entangle him. In this position, deprived of the power of doing much mischief, he is speedily despatched with spears.

A tiger has, unfortunately for himself, an appetite that makes his presence soon felt in the neighbourhood that he patronises. He levies black mail on every man's cattle, without distinction, especially marking for his delectation your best-going pony and the milch cow which was imported at a cost of many rupees, or, when these delicacies are not obtainable, a favourite dog will serve his purpose. Horses are just as much afraid of tigers or cheetahs as the natives themselves, and will utter a sharp scream, and shy at any spot on the road where one has crossed,

manifesting signs of the greatest terror. It is a foolhardy, dangerous sport to go out on foot to follow up the brute, as, besides his extraordinary tenacity of life, he is able to get over the ground much more rapidly than a man, even when severely wounded, and becomes an awkward *vis-à-vis*; yet at other times, if left alone, he is a most egregious skulk and coward.

A man engaged in tea-planting has his time fully occupied from the first of January to the thirty-first of December, and there is not much opportunity for sport. Elephants are in constant requisition for garden service and cannot be spared for the hunt. Assam abounds with tigers, cheetahs, rhinoceri, elephants, buffalo, etc., and is the best country in the world for affording every kind of big game shooting. On the whole, as a place of residence, my preference is given to the Zoological Gardens, London, thinking it to be the better place of the two for quiet observation of the habits and customs of the carnivora and graminivora. I confess that the sport of shooting these huge animals is, to my mind, a gross misnomer, and no amount of argument will convince me that I am in error. At the Zoo every facility is afforded to the seekers after knowledge; besides, there is the negative advantage of watching their pleasant little ways with good inch-iron bars intervening. Reasons that need not be entered into here render it impossible to be on such close terms of intimacy when the animal is in its wild state.

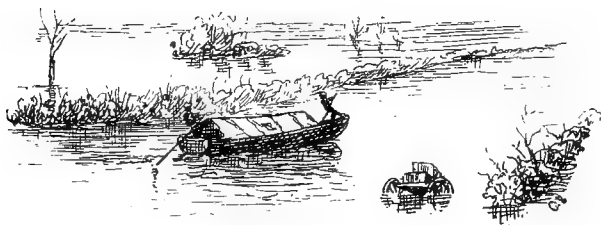
Travelling about the country is attended with numberless difficulties, and forms a serious addition to the bothers of life out here. The choice of conveyance is settled by the condition of the roads, a good road being traversable by buggy, but for an average road the only means of locomotion are tats or a hatti (elephant), the latter for choice. Many a journey, well commenced in a buggy, has been abruptly terminated by the road suddenly ceasing to exist ; where formerly stood a bridge, only a rushing stream and a few broken planks remain to mark its place. These same bridges are a source of endless trouble to roadkeepers, and it is judicious before starting to send on a man a day ahead to examine the condition of the bridges, and notify any changes that may have taken place in the state of the road. The continual wearing away of the sides is misleading on a dark night, and occasionally brings about a spill—not a pleasant break in a journey when some distance from one's destination. White ants and the rains work vigorously together and quickly rot all bridges made of timber ; a comparatively sound-looking plank often proves but a trap for the unwary voyager.

Sometimes the earth or plaited bamboo matting on the bridge, placed there to make a tolerably even surface, fall away, and your pony has to half scramble, half jump across the best way he can, at the risk of his legs and your neck. Then, too, in travelling by river, I have previously mentioned the unavoidable irregularity of steamers, how they are two or three



BROKEN BRIDGE.

days behind time. This entails a regular fit-out of bedding, food, etc., for the time that may have to be passed on the landing flat. Everything must be taken, even a filter, for the water of the river is invariably too turbid for drinking purposes. It is no use calculating on a supply of animal food being forthcoming from the nearest village, so one must take sufficient chickens (alive) to last over three days. During the height of the rainy season, when the floods are out,



POLING OVER INUNDATED ROADS.

the river cannot be got at by road, and there is no alternative but to hire a native boat, and pole down across the fields and high roads, which lie deep under water. An uncanny business that, punting down the same road which you have always previously had to drive along. Getting to the river during the rainy season is beset with difficulties too numerous to detail, and has often to be accomplished with the combined assistance of a buggy, a pony, an elephant, and a native boat.

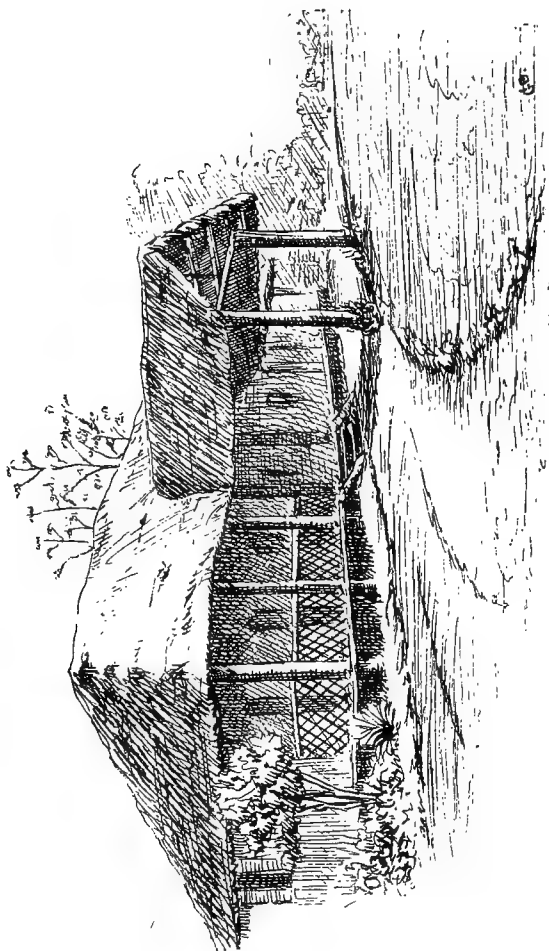
CHAPTER V.

THE BUNGALOW—HOW IT IS CONSTRUCTED—A WET NIGHT—
THE BAWURCHEE KHANA—HOSPITALITY TO STRANGERS—
NUMBER OF SERVANTS NECESSARY—DIFFICULTIES OF
CATERING—THE EVER-PRESENT CHICKEN—FISH AND
FISHERMEN—TASTY VIANDS—INSECTS—BEDTIME AND ITS
TROUBLES—FANATICISM—EARTHQUAKES AND STORMS.

AN Assamese bungalow is a lightly-constructed habitation, put together as quickly and inexpensively as possible—unlike anything else built—and differs entirely from the buildings of Western civilisation. It disdains the prim correctness of outline, the perpendicular, and the more offensive (to the eye) rectangular regularity of bricks and mortar, and is, without an attempt at disguise, merely a gigantic pigeon-roost, standing forth an unsurpassed marvel of ugliness. No efforts at ornamentation could make it rank amongst things sightly, the top-heavy look of the heavily-thatched roof condemns it at once to the admirer of the well-proportioned; besides, ornamentation is expensive and unnecessary—sufficiently good reasons for dispensing with it.

For the most part, planters' bungalows are built entirely of wood, thatch and mud, bricks being very difficult to procure, on account of the unsuitable

character of the earth, which is too friable for brick-making. The tendency of any building made of



ASSAM BUNGALOW.

country bricks (or "puckha," the ordinary Indian term) is to rapidly crumble away. Fortunately there are no

frosts, or the bricks would not last through the first winter. Taking into account the horrible fact that Assam is a land not entirely guiltless of earthquakes, a wooden-built bungalow is, after all, not such a bad place to live in, and a much safer residence when the surrounding locality is bumping up and down than an un-yielding habitation made of bricks. The main portion of a bungalow is built with large uprights, sunk deep down into the ground, generally trunks of good-sized trees with the bark peeled off; about five to twelve feet up, a deep notch is made in each of the uprights, in which to place the beams for the flooring to rest on. The height of this flooring varies according to the height of the uprights obtainable, but the higher the better. The idea of this raised "chung," as it is locally designated, is to prevent close proximity to the ground which exhales malaria, and to keep the habitable quarter of the bungalow as clear as possible from the pestiferous earth. Every authority maintains that this precaution is most essential for the preservation of health. Steps lead up to the chung, the space underneath being devoted to the storage of lumber, old boxes, packing-cases, etc. About eight or ten feet round the outside edge of the chung is utilised as a verandah; then come the walls of the bungalow. These are made of coarse jungle-grass twisted together, covered over on both sides with a composition of mud, sometimes lime-washed, or left its own colour, a greyish yellow, according to the artistic taste of the occupant, and fixed into squares made by

the uprights and cross-beams. Mud and grass form, when dry, a sufficiently good wall, but are not strong enough to offer resistance to the well-intentioned kick of any person who has a mind to enter.

The interior, according to custom, is divided into three rooms, partitioned off by walls made of the same material as the outside walls ; but if the bungalow is not large enough, there are only two rooms. Sixty feet by forty make a fair-sized place and allow plenty of accommodation. The central of the three rooms is used as sitting, dining, and general reception room ; the two others serve as the owners' and friends' bedchambers. To each is attached, on the outside, a gosol-khana (bath-room), which ought to be some short distance from the main portion of the dwelling-place, in order to do away with an accumulation of stagnant water under the chung. To add to the unpicturesqueness of the structure, a huge porch is to be seen in many bungalows, overhanging the steps that form the only approach. The whole of the roof is made of short, straight trees for the main beams, with bamboo rafters ; on the top is laid thatch, a coarse species of jungle-grass bound up in bundles. The roof is lashed together with *bêt*, a kind of rattan cane, thinly split up, pliable and very strong. Everything in Assam that requires tying up firmly is done with *bêt* in lieu of string, being much readier to hand and less liable to give way.

The fearful downpours of rain here necessitate an enormous thickness of thatch to keep the place

water-tight ; yet, notwithstanding the trouble that is taken, it is the exception to find a bungalow perfectly thatched ; the wind drives the rain under, and forms a combination that no human ingenuity can stand against. As it is no uncommon occurrence to have two or three inches of rain in a night, roofs are frequently put to a severe test, and it is after



MOSQUITOES.

these downpours that roofs, bridges, and roads have to be overhauled.

There are few more complete agonies than, in the middle of the night, to be rudely awakened by a sudden splash of water on the face, and jumping up to find that your bed is already wet through. Nothing for it but to light up, if the matches can be found and are not too wet to ignite, hunt out some more clothes,

make up the bed in another corner, and wait until, as too often happens, the rain comes in there, and drives you to seek a new site for your disturbed slumbers. It is amusing enough, if dry yourself, to lie and watch another man, half asleep, pulling his bed sadly after him, seeking rest and not finding a single dry place that measures six feet by three on which to put his mattress. But directly it becomes a personal matter, the amusement ceases and becomes a nuisance.

In front of the bungalow is the verandah, on which the planter, when he is not out and about the garden, spends the chief portion of his time. Here he writes letters, makes up accounts, receives the visits of, and interviews his mohurirs (head men on the estate), gets all the cool air that he possibly can, sleeps after tiffin, if he feels so inclined, and when he retires for the night his place is taken by chowkeydars (watchmen),



HEAD MOHURIR.

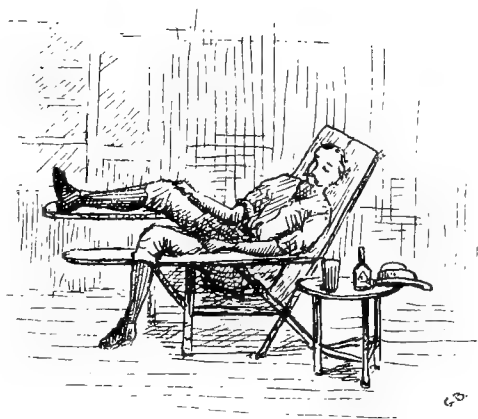
and a good many of the rabble of the garden, vagrant restless spirits who come up to share the watch, or have a chat over the events of the day with the chowkeydar and pani-wallah (water-carrier). The former of these patronisingly gives much interesting information concerning the latest doings of the sahib (is he not cognisant of his smallest action?), all that is worth detailing and reflecting his own

glory. These people make themselves comfortable, notwithstanding the crowds of mosquitoes, and contrive to sleep soundly in the most uncouth positions and surrounded by deafening noises.

At a distance of twenty or thirty yards stands the bawurchee-khana (cook-house); here the servants, when not at work, are generally to be found indulging in the stupefying hubble-bubble. Perhaps the less said concerning the interior arrangements of most Indian kitchens the better. An Englishwoman on her arrival, full of recollections of bright copper pans and well-scrubbed floors, at first puts forth all her energies in trying to establish order and cleanliness, but has finally to give in, beaten by the natural affection for dirt inherent in all Easterns, and the outlandish change in all things connected with the culinary department. It is astonishing how a native with his limited supply of cooking utensils will contrive to turn out five or six courses for dinner: given three bricks, a pot, and fire, and an Indian will do wonders.

A bungalow can hardly be designated by the proud title of its owner's castle, seeing that at no time is he safe from the interruption of passers-by. The distance from each other of the dâk-bungalows (Government rest-houses) and the absence of anything in the character of an inn or hotel, make it indispensable that every bungalow should be an asylum for the traveller. Here let me say that a more hospitable set of men than Assam planters does not exist: it is

no half-hearted welcome that is extended to the visitor ; he is made to feel at home immediately on his arrival. In exchange for food and shelter he brings news of what is going on round about, and all the "gup" of the country through which he has just passed. Should he arrive wet, not having sent on his things, or through the stupid vagaries of his coolies his traps are taken elsewhere, a change of



REPOSE.

clothes is given to him, together with a something to keep off fever. So he sits at table, and his host produces his best for his edification, shares his mosquito curtain with him at night, and does all in his power to make the guest comfortable. Although an utter stranger, is he not a white man? and is it not probable that your present guest will at some future date act in the capacity of your host? Not

that this calculation has any effect on the extent of the cordiality of his reception. It is considered a serious breach of etiquette to pass a man's bungalow, even though he be the veriest stranger, without calling in to exchange civilities. The distance from everywhere and the paucity of bungalows makes it equally agreeable to the dispenser of hospitality and the recipient, to meet and exchange views on matters touching the tea world. Communication between Assam and the outer world is so bad that no news can arrive earlier than seven or eight days after it has left Calcutta, even if it starts in newspaper form; thus conversation becomes strictly local, and as each locality is interested in tea, the outcome of all conversation is an argument on the different modes adopted for its manufacture, a most engrossing subject to the planter, but not quite so interesting to a casual visitor (*rara avis*) to the district, or any unfortunate lady who may be present, to whom it becomes fearfully monotonous.

The ordinary routine of a day is, up at five, chota hazree (small breakfast) at five-thirty, work until eleven, when hazree is served, afterwards rest until two o'clock, followed by work until five-thirty or six, bath and dinner and a final adjournment to the verandah, where reading, smoking, a chat, if there is any one to talk with, over the result of the day's work, until nine-thirty, bed time, brings the day to a close.

In consequence of the frequency of stray visitors alighting unexpectedly at the bungalow, a capital

plan is adopted throughout Assam of having meals at the same time, so that the traveller shall be able to time his arrival or departure comfortably, and his host shall not have all his domestic arrangements upset by his servants having to serve various meals at odd times. It is a great saving of trouble and expense, and is pretty nearly universally recognised through the province.

Mode of life is the same over all the tea districts, and life in one bungalow is a fair sample of life in all. Servants are either Mussulmans or Hindus: the former must be secured in Calcutta and taken up country; the latter are recruited from the better class of coolies on the garden, and promoted to bungalow work. It is no easy matter to persuade Mussulman servants to leave the delights of Calcutta life to dare the wilds of Assam, for every non-inhabitant of that delightful country has been taught from his youth that the place is peopled with devils; and the only means of procuring their services is to double or even treble their ordinary wages: without this inducement they will flatly refuse to enter a service. Caste prejudices step in directly the native is brought into contact with the European. The Mussulman's particular line of service is waiting at table and cooking, at which he excels, while the Hindu takes the place of house and parlour-maid, making the beds and doing the dirty work. A Hindu, unless he should be of very low caste, or as he is generally called, a jungle-wallah, no caste at all, will not kill a chicken or cook

any form of food for the white man. Here the necessity for the Mussulman's services arises. To him it is a pleasure to kill anything ; he revels in blood, and is never so happy as when he has some wretched animal's throat to cut.

The number of servants required in India is at first sight appalling. To begin with, each person has a kitmutgar, or waiter, to attend to his wants at dinner, a species of butler in fact ; next there is a bearer to look after the bedroom and act as valet, then the khansama (cook) and his assistant, two or

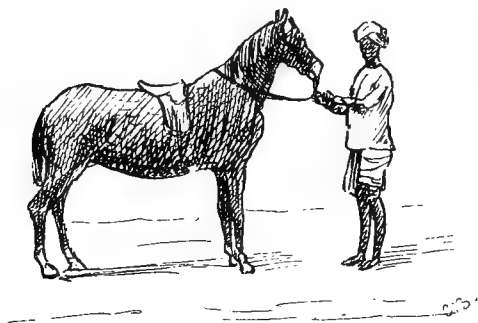


THE MATER (SWEEPER).

three pani-wallahs (water-carriers), the mater (sweeper), two chowkeydars (watchmen,) one for night, the other for day duty, punkah-wallahs (two or three for pulling the punkah during the hot weather), syces (one for each horse), malee (gardeners, according to size of garden, moorgie-wallah (to look after the chickens), gorukhiya (cow-herd), and a few others. These make up a considerable establishment in point of numbers. There is no bell in a bungalow, so servants are summoned by a call : the chowkeydar on duty being at hand, takes up the sahib's summons for the servant in question ; the other servants, hearing the shouting, lend their inharmonious voices to the disturbed state of things, and the whole air echoes back the name of the man in request. He is, in all

probability, rolled up in some out-of-the-way corner, fast asleep, dreaming sweetly of his country, where the wife that he ran away from on account of their poverty, when the land was threatened with a drought, awaits his return, and may continue in this unenviable state of suspense so far as he is concerned, for has he not, since his arrival in this country, again tempted Hymen, and taken unto himself another dusky maiden?

One insurmountable difficulty is constantly present



SYCE (GROOM).

before the bungalow caterer which it is impossible to get over, namely, how to vary the diet. Day succeeds day, and the monotony of chicken meat remains unchanged: chicken in every form, chicken cutlets, steaks, minced, spatchcocked, rissoled, roasted, boiled, curried, in soup, on toast, fried, devilled, and many other ways. No man exists who has been in India and has not been compelled to sit down every day of his life to at least one meal in

which chicken figured conspicuously in some form or another. These miserable fowls, a weak burlesque on their English prototypes, are procured by the moorgie-wallah, whose duty it is to start off every morning and scour the surrounding villages for the purpose of buying up all available chickens, ducks and eggs. The birds are brought back on a bamboo stick, strung up by the legs, head downwards. Such treatment in a hot country would give any bird but a



MOORGIE WALLAH (CHICKEN CARRIER).

hen apoplexy ; they do not, however, in this country have a chance to so enrich their blood by overfeeding as to render them susceptible to an attack of this malady. An occasional glimmer of hope, a meteor of change shoots across the culinary horizon in the shape of a duck or a goose, while those who are fortunate enough to live in the vicinity of three or four

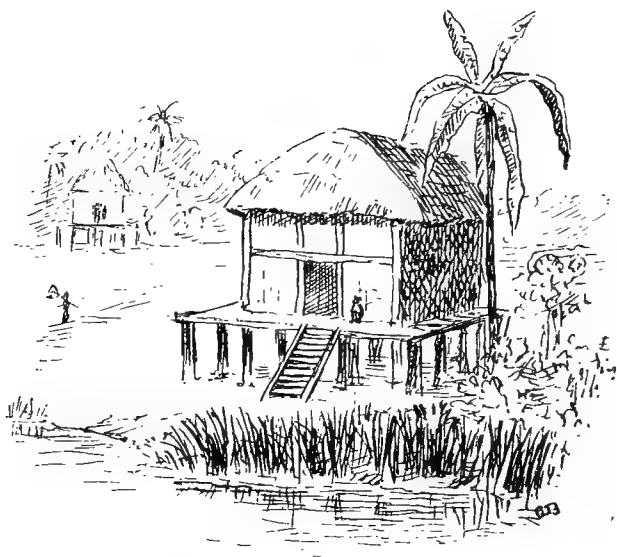
other planters can form a sheep club, and kill once a month or once a fortnight, as requirement may happen. An ordinary man, with a good appetite and fair digestive organs, could make one square meal off an Assam sheep, the ovine ambition here seeming to be to vie with the greyhound in slenderness, rather than in devoting all its energies and reserve forces to developing that flesh in which man delights,

a perverseness that no amount of feeding up can overcome. Mutton, small as it is, is indeed a welcome variation, and although nearly always tough, its charms are great to the involuntary chicken eater. Kids well fattened (few know how hard it is to persuade a kid to put on fat in a climate where the thermometer averages about 88° in the shade, but those who have made the daring attempt to outrage nature) are quite as good as mutton; in truth, it is almost impossible to distinguish between them when cooked.

If near a river, the natives fish and sell the product, such as it is; the only taste that it possesses—and of that it need not be proud for it is not its own—being a powerful earthy flavouring of the mud in which it lives and moves, unpalatable enough when all the queer things found in the river are not quite banished from the recollection, but are associated with the feeding grounds of the said fish. Large rivers contain an animal which is highly extolled all over India, the hilsa, a very rich bony fish, during whose demolition the idea always crossed my mind whether the small pleasure of eating the flesh was not more than counterbalanced by the exquisite pain that I endured from the terribly sharp bones sticking into the roof of my mouth; for every mouthful contains more bones than flesh, and no care can make hilsa-eating anything but a very dangerous pastime.

Along the banks of the Brahmapootra are dotted, at considerable intervals, small collections of raised

huts, occupied by a fishing race of people called the Dhooms. These and another distinct people, the Kacharis, live entirely by their fishing, and are to be seen plying their trade with net and line at all hours of the day. Sometimes they catch mahseer, the Indian salmon, a gigantic fellow armed with large,



DHOOMS (RAISED HUTS).

tough scales, and weighing, when in good condition and full grown, sixty to eighty pounds. Many other kinds, not fit for an European's table, are caught ; but mahseer and hilsa are the two principal products of the river that repay the fisherman's toil. So much for the chance of getting a little fish for dinner—at

the best of times a poor one, for the people are often too lazy to catch more than they require for their own immediate use, or, if fortune favours them, and there is a big haul, too indolent to carry it up to the nearest bungalow for disposal.

The only changes of food that can be depended upon are tinned provisions of all sorts, but they make large demands on a limited purse, the cost in Assam, after freight from England has been added, rendering them almost prohibitive to the poor assistant on one hundred and fifty rupees a month. American meat, jams, whole fruit preserved in bottles, sardines, and such things are luxuries even to the wealthy members of the planting fraternity. One disadvantage attaches to tinned provisions, wonderfully handy though they are in an emergency—that it is impossible when once opened to keep them for any length of time ; directly the air gets at the contents it speedily goes bad, unless meanwhile the ants or mice, anticipating delay, finish off the pot and leave nothing to spoil.

At the close of a hard day's work, returning exhausted and dizzy from exposure to the scorching sun, it requires a strong effort to eat even the most delicate luxuries, if attainable ; but as it is more often the inevitable chicken, the choice is strictly limited. At such a time curry is the only dish that can be taken with anything approaching to satisfaction. Everything else is too dry or too greasy, and generally uninviting, but curry can be made palatable by the addition of chutney, and we reluctantly eat

the former in order to indulge in the latter, on the same principle that people eat oysters—at least, this is my humble opinion—not because they appreciate the bivalve, but because it is a polite way of taking vinegar and pepper, for an oyster without these condiments is a dish not fit to be set before the humblest individual. Native curry is as unlike the abomination that in England passes by that name as it is possible to imagine. Instead of the fiery cayenne with which all cooks at home think it necessary to warm up the dish, there is a delicacy of flavour that can never be attained away from the East—a blending of good things that makes it what it is—uncommonly palatable.

The heat after dinner when the sun has gone down is fearfully trying; no cool breeze springs up to make life more bearable for the exhausted planter, the atmosphere becomes heavy, damp, and sultry; the air seems to stand quite still, and considerable difficulty is experienced in drawing breath. Dinner over, an adjournment is made to the verandah of the bungalow, for the benefit of all the air that can be obtained. Here quiet enjoyment is out of the question, and life is made wretched by thousands of mosquitos, whose appetites seem whetted by the state of things; bats dart about overhead, rustling their great wings within an inch of your head, and multitudinous specimens of the insect world alight most unexpectedly on some part of your skin. This atmospheric condition continues until two or three o'clock in the

morning, when, just before daylight, a cool breeze sweeps along over the plain. Then is the time, the weary planter being happily unconscious and enjoying his well-earned rest, that danger to bodily health is to be apprehended. During the earlier hours of the night the intense heat puts sleep out of the question; turning over and over does not help to keep on the one sheet that is the only covering; pyjamahs feel as thick as winter clothes, and yet, notwithstanding the awful discomfort, a certain amount of wrapping up is an absolutely necessary precaution. Round the waist, covering that portion of the body where the liver is situated, a large scarf, called a kummerbund, is wound many times. By wearing this protection, usually made of varicolored silks, and measuring three to four yards in length, the system is able to resist sudden chills and consequent fever. I have known men go through their first two or three years without wearing a kummerbund, but after their first bad chill, they will invariably be brought to confess that there is some use in it after all. If it were not for the cool wind springing up at a time when men are enjoying their first sleep, or a shock of earthquake—an occasion when it is desirable, if you consider your life worth the preserving, to effect as speedy an exit as possible from under the bungalow—there would be an excuse for everyone turning in, during the rains, clad only *in naturalibus*.

Beds are according to taste; the coolest and most comfortable for hot weather is a native-made frame

with broad tapes stretched tightly across, and a spring mattress for the cold season. If well in the jungle or near the Naga territory, it is advisable to sleep with a loaded revolver either under the pillow or near at hand, for use against tigers or panthers, which do not find the jump on to the chung any very great hindrance to their inquisitiveness, and may at any time stroll in through the open doors of your bedroom and look round. Again, there is the fear of a vindictive coolie, who perchance may think it a happy deliverance, so far as he is personally interested in your demise, to brain you. One planter, in Cachar, awoke on a morning, two years ago, to find a coolie standing over him with a naked dhau (half chopper, half knife) in his hand, and wearing anything but an amicable expression. But, objecting strongly to the turn the proceedings were about to take, he succeeded, after a brief struggle, in wresting the weapon out of this well-intentioned man's hands. The only reason that the planter ever afterwards obtained for his intended assassination was at the man's trial, when he stated that he had a dream, wherein, at the peril of offending his deities, he was ordered to kill the sahib. Thereupon he arose, thinking that there was no time like the present, and, armed with the dhau, promptly proceeded up to the bungalow to carry out his supposed mission, with the most business-like precision. The fortunate sudden awakening of the sahib rather reversed the position of affairs, and was the only thing upon which he had not calcu-

lated. When asked in court to give some explanation for his dastardly behaviour, and whether the sahib was cruel, he candidly confessed that the sahib was an exceptionally good master, treated all the coolies well, and they had no grounds for complaint in any way.

This and many other stories of the fanatical vagaries of coolies are in circulation throughout the country, and are at the outset rather terrifying to new comers.

To refer again to earthquakes, they have not been of frequent recurrence of late years; slight shocks make themselves felt from time to time, but have not been sufficiently violent to damage houses built puckah. It would be an unfortunate occurrence if, now that a large number of planters are building tea-houses and bungalows with bricks, there were to be a severe shock, such as visited Silhet a few years back—when bungalows built of bamboo came out of the ordeal much better than the more solidly-constructed buildings. For four or five hours preceding an earthquake the stillness of the air is most marked; there seems to be nothing to breathe; all Nature saves her strength and prepares to resist the tumultuous shock.

I do not know which is the most unpleasant—when the air is perfectly immovable, and the punkah wallah cannot create a suspicion of a breeze, pull he ever so lustily, or when the storm, that you have been watching rolling up the valley, bursts with its first crash on the roof of the bungalow. So far as the

eye can see, the advancing storm catches on its course the tops of trees, and bends them down towards mother earth. The bamboos, pliant of stem, are first to submit to the tyranny of the winds, bowing their heads, crowned with glorious feather-like foliage; then follow the larger trees, resisting to the last the rush of the tempest. Nearer and nearer rolls up the dark cloud, charged with discordant elements; until at a distance of two or three miles the hissing roar can



PUNKAH WALLAH.

be distinctly heard, as the wind shrieks and the rain pours down. Now is the moment to rush out on to the verandah and have a good refreshing blow. Oh, how delicious it is! No hot muggy vapour this, but a cold wind that penetrates straight into your lungs and makes you thank Providence for a premature glimpse of cool weather. No matter that the wind is playing

sad havoc inside the bungalow, bursting open doors, ripping up the blue muslin that is substituted for glass windows, knocking over chairs, tearing up the matting under which it has managed to get, and sweeping everything movable before it. The compound is littered with papers, topis, and other light paraphernalia, girating round the bungalow; but the chowkeydar will have to collect these waifs at his leisure; meanwhile "*carpe diem.*"

Rain storms in Assam are remarkable on account of the enormous deluge; the noise made by the water falling on the roof often renders any attempts at conversation utterly futile. A night's rain will not unfrequently measure two and a half to three inches. Wind, thunder, and lightning accompany these tempests, and to convey by description an idea of the awful noise of a thunderstorm in the tropics requires a much more able pen than mine. My first impression of a good storm, occurring shortly after our arrival, was that nothing built by man could stand up against the furious charges. Lightning surrounded us on all sides; and so close was the storm that I fancied that I heard the hiss of the electric flash as it darted round the bungalow. The crashing roars of thunder were similar to what one may imagine the noise would be if, standing in a circle composed of eighty-ton guns, they were to be discharged together at intervals of half a minute.

By a fortunate dispensation the heavier portion of the rainfall occurs at night, which enables the planter to get out to his work without a ducking, and the probable resultant fever. The coolies dislike rain for the same reason, and wet leaf when plucked and brought into the withering-house is a source of much trouble and annoyance; so the time for rain is providentially arranged for the best. Extraordinary variations are recorded in the amount of rain falling in districts close to each other; frequently three or four miles will make a difference of half an inch in

three or four hours' fall. Taking an average throughout the valley of Assam, probably ninety inches would represent the fall over the total area for each year; but on this point I speak with hesitation. Hail reaches an enormous size, and this is a visitor that a planter does not care to see. A heavy hailstorm cuts the young shoots and leaves off tea bushes as cleanly as if they had been lopped with a pruning-knife, and from such a visitation a garden will not recover for a considerable period, the flush will be checked, and the plants thrown back for the rest of the season.

CHAPTER VI.

READY-MADE GARDENS—OPENING OUT—ENEMIES TO THE
TEA PLANT—OLD PLANTERS AND THEIR MODE OF WORK-
ING—GOVERNMENT OBSTRUCTION—VALUE OF LAND—
SELECTING SEED—THE LABOUR DIFFICULTY—CLEARING
THE JUNGLE—PLUCKING—HOEING—MANUFACTURING—
A DAY'S WORK—LAZINESS OF COOLIES—ROLLING BY
HAND AND MACHINERY—DESTRUCTION CAUSED BY
ANIMALS IN A GARDEN.

THROUGH the partial failure of a season's crop, either in point of price obtained at the sales or smallness of the output and consequent money embarrassments, or the owner being compelled to return home on account of ill-health, or a dissolution of partnership taking place, or death, or a hundred and one other possible events that may crop up, ready-made gardens occasionally come into the market; but these, unless there is something fundamentally wrong with them, command a large price, far too heavy an outlay for a man starting with but a limited capital to entertain a thought of. On the other hand, if the planter—and by planter I mean a man of practical experience—determines to open out for himself, the process is tedious, anxious work. Four years is a long time to wait before the capital sunk

begins to show any return, during the whole of which time it is all disbursements and no receipts. Then, too, unfortunately, during this lengthy period the planter cannot exist on air ; so, what with expenses of laying out a garden, added to cost of living, interest on capital, risk, etc., there are many speculations open which would seem to be of a more promising nature. When laying out a garden it is indispensable to first sit down and count the cost of it; for if at the end of two or three years the funds give out, money must be raised at a most extravagant rate of interest, and is difficult to obtain at any price, on a mortgage of the property; an awful incumbrance for a young garden to have to contend against; besides, as too often happens, placing the agent who makes the advance in a position, at no distant date, to dictate his own terms. A small quantity of tea can be made the fourth year, but this will not suffice to pay working expenses, and had best not be reckoned upon in the banker's account.

The tea bush has many enemies, amongst which the most prominent are blight, red spider, bad drainage, too much sun or too much rain (both equally disastrous) and others. Bad blight or red spider has the effect of throwing back the plant and depriving the garden of two or three flushes, a serious consideration at the outset of the fifth year, when there are hopes of recouping, to some extent a portion of the former heavy outlays. With bad drainage there can be no hope of a successful future for any

garden. The drainage difficulty used to be surmounted by making all gardens on the side of a hill ; in fact, every one of the old gardens was made in this way, and it took many years before the possibility of growing tea on the plains dawned upon the somewhat dense minds of old planters. Nowadays men of good stamp and education are willing to embark in this rough business, but twenty or thirty years ago few gentlemen were interested in the actual business of tea planting, the honourable fraternity consisting, for the greater part, of professional gardeners, men sent out by garden proprietors or managers of companies, who argued that, because a man knew how to dig and delve in England, he must necessarily be able to cultivate tea in Assam. It is needless to remark that with such men to conduct an undertaking, not much brains were put into the management ; each generation was contented to follow exactly in the steps of the generation that had preceded it. Round Gowhatty, on the way up the Brahmapootra, are many standing instances of the unreasonableness of planting tea on steep hills, which here are studded with bushes in a deplorable state of non-cultivation ; vacancies are the rule, and not, as they ought to be, the exception. This latter term, by the way, applies to places where the bushes ought to stand, but, through negligence or some cause, have died out and never been replaced. After a heavy rainfall the mould on the side of a hill was washed down, leaving all the upper sides of the roots exposed. The expenses of working such a

garden were seriously augmented by the labour required to bank up the shrubs again ; but now the fallacy of the old system is thoroughly appreciated, and men save money in consequence.

Formerly thousands of acres were carelessly put out, the seed in the first instance being any rubbish that could be obtained, and the distance when planted out between the rows absurdly wasteful ; but again this is all altered. Men pay large prices for carefully selected seed ; in fact, it was these large prices that prevented the old planters from buying, for in their day there was no necessity to be very careful about selected seed ; anything in the shape of a tea bush was as good as a gold mine, and the early adventurers took no thought for the time, which was bound to arrive, when the acreage of tea in India would increase vastly, only the prolific plants would find favour, and prices must fall. To this increase should be added the recent severe and unexpected depression on all commerce, extending over a period of four or five years, affecting all classes of society. During the whole of this long period the market has been against the planter of Indian teas, both in price and in the quantity consumed ; whereas the increased output and corresponding facilities for purchasing at cheaper rates were calculated in ordinary times to create a demand that would be proportionately great.

To show what high opinions were held of tea as a certain road to fortune in olden days, thus runs the story :—An enterprising planter sold a so-called

garden for two lacs of rupees. The negotiations were completed while the worthy proprietor was in England on a visit. At the time of the sale the garden was *in nubibus*, and consisted of a fine stretch of jungly land. A telegram to his manager to clear and put out at once anything that could with reason be called a tea plant, followed the handing over of the first instalment of purchase-money, and when in due course the unfortunate purchaser arrived in the East, he found his newly-acquired possession with about ten bushes to the acre: the rest had died out—so said the vendor. It is a pretty little tale of treachery, and has one advantage over most other stories—it is quite true.

In the competition between the old and new gardens there can be only one result—the failure of the old gardens. A fair average to take per acre for old tea is four maunds (80 lbs. to the maund); for modern gardens seven or eight maunds would not be an excessive computation: one garden at Negreting made as much as fifteen maunds, but this, of course, is a rare exception. How is it possible, therefore, for old tea gardens to compete, with a chance of success, against new? The same amount of labour is required for the one as for the other; expenses are but slightly increased when the result attained is looked into.

At the present time of writing the non-existence of freehold tenure and inability to purchase outright a site suitable for a plantation, raises a serious obstacle to the development of enterprise amongst that section of men who would probably embark money in the

venture with a view to the future increased value of the property for those that come after them. Now as the law stands, the right of granting leases is vested in the Indian Government, to whom all applications have to be made, comparatively short terms only being granted. There are some freehold properties that were acquired years ago, but the number of gardens enjoying this advantage is but few. Sub-leases, or leases granted by any other than the recognised Government representative, always partake of a doubtful character, and great caution must be exercised at starting to secure a sound title. A fictitious value is set upon land that is, suppositionally, likely to be required by Government at some future date. This little joke is so well maintained that it is usual, on putting in an application, to find that that one particular spot is very dear to the heart of the powers that be; and I verily believe that the same would be the case with nine sites out of every ten. Even the poor planter, whose sole requirement is a piece of jungly ground, which the country can count by thousands of acres, and for which he is willing to pay a handsome price, cannot escape contact with red tapeism in some form or another.

The value of land depends upon the quality of its soil, the amount and kind of jungle growing upon it, the distance from the nearest station, accessibility to a high-road or river, etc. Rent at first is merely a nominal sum, on account of the land being valueless until it has been cleared, a costly process requiring

much labour. The greatest drawback in the system of acquiring land is the difficulty of obtaining a spot, selected at considerable trouble and expense. After much travelling about and time wasted in prospecting for a favourable locality in which to start a garden, and having at length found the desired spot, the applicant interviews the *mozadar*, and sends in his written application for a lease. Measurements are taken, and due notice is advertised of the intended letting. On an appointed day, at the nearest station, the lease is put up to be sold by auction to the highest bidder, such is the absurdly unfair system, and the man who has used his time, money, and experience in finding the spot, is placed on exactly the same footing as anyone else who likes to bid for it. Men living in the neighbourhood, if they object to the new arrival, or are churlishly disposed, can combine together to buy up the plot, even if they have no intention of making use of it. Thus the system works very harshly on those who, anxious to start as soon as possible, have neither time nor money to waste in finding places that other men may purchase over their heads.

Measurements are delightfully indefinite, as a rule, the actual dimensions and the Government plans are at total variance, the discrepancy amounting often to ten acres, more or less. In one case that I wot of, the planter had considerably the best of it. His application for 500 acres was considered, and the land marked out in an unusually slipshod

fashion : he now finds himself the proud holder of 700 acres, a slight mistake of over 200 acres having crept in somewhere.

The official description of the boundaries is also extremely ludicrous. A small jân, or watercourse, that is continually shifting its position, will form one side ; a bor tree, where there are hundreds of these trees, will be another definite boundary ; the edge of the jungle—about as fixed a boundary as the sand-banks of the Brahmapootra, and always alterable by cutting down more jungle—will probably form the other two sides.

The timber on the property is the only really valuable part about it, and is of great importance to the planter when building his bungalow, tea-houses, lines for coolies' dwellings, and for making charcoal. It must always be borne in mind that for this latter purpose there should be fair-sized timber in the immediate vicinity ; imported charcoal is more expensive, crumbles on its travels, and is not carefully picked. Another necessity in choosing a site is to have good water, if possible, running near the bungalow. For drinking purposes, this is a *sine quâ non*, preventing epidemics amongst the coolies, and helping more than anything else to keep them in good health. Natural drainage should be kept in sight to save the expense and waste of time in cutting drains. Tea-houses, bungalow, and outhouses must lie tolerably high and close together, to enable the planter to get from bungalow to tea-house rapidly—an immense

advantage for looking sharply after coolies during the delicate firing process. If possible, select grass jungle, on account of the ease with which a clearance can be made, although there is more danger of fire, and the precaution of keeping a space of three or four hundred yards round the bungalow absolutely clear of jungle must be adopted.

On selecting seed for a garden—an essential part of planting that has certainly, up to the present, not been fully appreciated—depends that all-important probability, the planter's prospect of making it pay. Transporting seed from place to place has an injurious effect on its growing powers, and the farther the distance that it has to travel, the greater percentage of barren seeds result. Some that was sent from Assam to Ceylon resulted in a loss of 80 per cent., entirely unproductive; and there were, not without cause, grave complaints at this result.

When building tea-houses, an iron roof will be found better than thatch, which is dangerously liable to ignite. Iron-roofed houses are trying to the European constitution, but the latter article is not of much account in tea districts; things that are good for tea are bad for poor humanity.

At the outset the question of labour is a stumbling-block of no small dimensions, in consequence of the expense of importing coolies from their own districts; for the Assamese, who are sparsely scattered over the country, are lazy and will not work, unless the rice crop fails, when they are compelled to turn to and

earn sufficient for their wants until the next season's crop. Kacharis are the only natives that can be relied upon for work, and they form the only bright side to the labour question. They travel in gangs of ten or twenty, from garden to garden, and will not take a job unless they are assured of being allowed to do at least a double day's work in one day. After a garden is got into good condition, and the work falls short, they will frequently pack up and move off to some other place, where their services are in demand. They are all powerful men and willing workers, and, more extraordinary still, fond of filthy lucre.

It can easily be understood that, with such difficulties to surmount, such work to be done, a manager of a tea garden must be a rather out of the ordinary sort of man. To be of any use he must be of strict integrity, in order to gain the confidence of his employers; sober, business-like, a good accountant, not easily ruffled, handy at carpentering and engineering, know something about soil, and have a smattering of information on all subjects; or, to put it concisely, he must be a veritable Jack-of-all-trades.

Now, as to the laying out, planting, plucking, hoeing, and other work in the planter's life, we had best begin at the opening out of a garden, and cut down our jungle. I shall try not to be tedious over the practical working of a garden, but all such details must be somewhat dry.

When the jungle has been cut down and disposed

of, there is splendid virgin soil ready to the clearer's hand, and it only requires working to bring forth its richness. The rugged beauty of dense jungle, twisted and interlaced in a perfect network of trees, ferns, creepers, and undergrowth; the variable tones of colour in the leaves, everywhere different in size and shape, from the broad grey-green leaf of the plantain to the silk-like threads of the multitudinous tiny grasses—the impenetrable intricacies of this vast mass of foliage, and the wonderful secrets of animal life that it contains, make the jungle a mysterious cause for wonderment to the lover of Nature in its wildest form. Clearing this for tea planting is a labour of great difficulty, and occupies much time when there is an insufficiency of labour. Few planters can find it in their



A PLANTER.

hearts to tell off coolies for this kind of work. Two growths of jungle must be mentioned—grass and wood. The former is easily cleared off by fire, but the latter is a more serious obstacle to dispose of. Gardens made on grass land have a great evil to contend against: during the first four or five years of their existence they are never exempt from

rapid growing jungle, which springs up with extraordinary rapidity.

The usual way of getting rid of timber jungle is to enter into a contract with Assamese to clear it at so much per acre. These men are accustomed to the work, and, having a contract, quickly get through their job; whereas a large party of coolies would have to be told off, to the detriment of the cultivation of the rest of the garden, in order to do what half the same number of Assamese can more readily accomplish. As the larger timber is cut down, unless the wood happens to be required for bungalow uprights or other building purposes (for which neem, feak, and the harder woods are always saved), charcoal pits are constructed here and there while the felling progresses. The labour of dragging huge trunks about is by this system economised, and at the same time they are got rid of. Charcoal is stored in go-downs, ready to be used in the tea-house for firing.

Going round a newly-cleared plot, and seeing the enormous waste of wood that cannot be avoided; for the soft-timbered trees are of no use either for building or charcoal; gigantic trees lying where they fell, to cumber the ground until ants and rot shall work their destruction; others rung halfway through, and threatening to topple over at the slightest suggestion of a wind, and a few with their tops cut clean away and fired round the roots, presenting a gaunt and desolate appearance—these sights make a new clearance anything but an enlivening scene. Trudging

over the ground, where creepers and roots have not been thoroughly turned in, can only be likened to a perambulation through a forest of man-traps : every creeper trips you up, and the stumps render the twisting of your ancle a momentarily occurrence. Add to these delights a sticky, heavy soil, that hampers your progress, and a walk through a new clearance is an event to be remembered, and afterwards avoided.



CLEARING THE GROUND.

If there is a weak spot in a planter's character—and surely he, to be like his fellow-men, must have his failing more or less developed—it will always be on the subject of nurseries for the seedlings, and a new clearance ; and the visitor may count himself lucky if he has not to tramp wearily in the manner that I have endeavoured to describe over many acres, all the while

feigning to be keenly interested in the sights that greet him, in reality heartily wishing himself well back in the bungalow, comfortably ensconced in an arm-chair. Every planter fondly imagines that there never has been such a nursery as his own, and his vanity at this period of his career is only just sufferable. Many trees cannot be left standing on account of the light

and sun required by the tea plant. Shrubs grown under the shelter of a tree always run up coarsely and dark in colour.



COOLIE HOEING.

After the ground is cleared, hoes are brought into requisition for turning up the soil, and burying what jungle may remain on the surface. The implement, supplied by the factory, has a blade about eight inches wide, with

a long handle, and in the hands of an irate coolie forms a very awkward weapon. Next to selecting the seed, good hoeing is the most important work, requiring more attention and regularity of arrangement than any of the other garden labours, since it continues without cessation throughout the year. There are two qualities of hoeing, light and deep; the first, as the word implies, is the less laborious kind, and consists of one chop with the hoe; deep

hoeing is two chops deep, and corresponds with our gardening method of trenching, two spades deep, in England. The deep hoeing nerrick averages about two-thirds of the light; and here occurs an opportunity for the coolie to shirk his work and get the better of his employer, for it is impossible, as the coolie well knows, to go over a large extent of ground and distinguish, by merely looking at it, which has been double hoed: a walking-stick plunged into the earth is about the handiest and most effective test. By dexterous manipulation the coolie cuts the top earth in such a way as to present the appearance of a good deep cut, and so saves that additional chop which he is supposed to have made. This artifice is most easily overlooked, and very hard to detect; but when found out, that coolie's next ten minutes are passed in a way not to be envied. Various forms of punishment—from a good thrashing to making him do two or three times the amount over again—are inflicted, but always with the same after-result, that if an opportunity presents itself he will invariably adopt all the devices of which he is master (and they are many) to shirk his work; a result, I regret to say, that is not entirely confined to the black labourer.

When the women have worked round the garden and finished plucking the leaf, for there is nothing more to pluck, the bushes have to be left until such time as they shall be ready again for the nimble-fingered ones; meanwhile the women are not allowed

to eat the curry of idleness, but are put on to hoe or to transplanting. The hoeing nerrick varies according to the condition of ground and depth of cut required. For men twenty to twenty-five nulls; women, about half this; except in the case of a new clearance, where there is a great deal of heavy work, then ten nulls will be a good day's work for a man. Twenty-five null hoeing is of the lightest description,



CARRYING LEAF.

and is the mere loosening of the top of the earth to the depth of three or four inches. The number of flushes are very nearly regulated by the amount of cultivation bestowed, and "The more hoeing the quicker the flushes" is a well understood maxim. Jungle (by which is meant grass, weeds, etc.) develops so speedily during the rains, that a regular system of working round the garden has to be observed in order that each plant should in turn have its chance of being freed

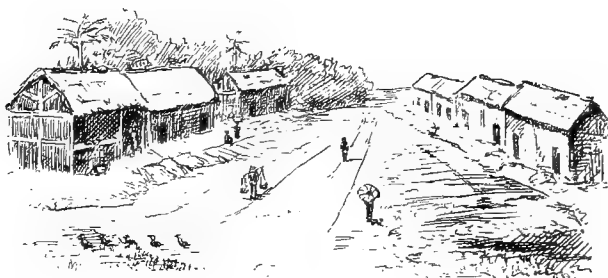
from jungle, that twines round and chokes it, and exercises a deleterious effect upon its growth. It is to facilitate rapidity in going round a garden when it is under-manned that light hoeing is employed.

After the soil has been deep hoed and is quite ready, transplanting from the nursery begins, for few

men sow the seed at stake. The nursery is made and carefully planted with seed on the first piece of ground that is cleared, so that by the time the remainder of the garden is ready to be planted out the seed has developed into a small plant, with strength enough to stand being transplanted. Holes are prepared at equal distances, into which the young plants are carefully transferred. The greatest caution is exercised in both taking them up and putting them in their new places, that the root shall be neither bent up nor injured in any way. For this work women and children are employed, as it is light but requires a gentle hand to pat down the earth around the young plant. It speedily accommodates itself to its new circumstances, and thrives wonderfully if the weather is at all propitious. A succession of hot days with no rain has a most disastrous effect on transplants: their heads droop and but a small percentage will be saved, which means that most of the work will have to be done over again. Once started, plenty of cultivation is the only thing required to keep the plant healthy, and it is left undisturbed for a couple of years to increase in size and strength. At the end of the second year, when the cold season has sent the sap down, the pruning knife dispossesses it of its long straggling top-shoots, and reduces it to a height of four feet; every plant is cut to the same level. The third year enables the planter to pluck lightly his first small crop. Year succeeds year, and the crop increases until the eighth or ninth

year, when the garden arrives at maturity, and yields as much as ever it will.

During the rains, the gong is beaten at five o'clock every morning, and again at six, thus allowing an hour for those who wish to have something to eat before commencing the labours of the day. In the cold weather the time for turning out is not so early ; even the Eastern sun is lazier, and there is not so much work to get through. Few of the coolies take anything to eat until eleven o'clock, when they are rung in. The leaf plucked by the women is collected and



THE COOLIE LINES.

weighed, and most of the men have finished their allotted day's work by this time, so they retire to their huts to eat the morning meal and to pass the remainder of the day in a luxury of idleness. For the ensuing two or three hours there is perfect rest, except for the unfortunate coolies engaged in the tea-house; their work cannot be left, and as fast as the leaf is ready it must be fired off, else it would

be completely ruined. At two o'clock the women are turned out again to pluck, and those men who have not finished their hoeing have to return to complete their task. About six o'clock the gong sounds again, the leaf is brought in, weighed, and spread, and outdoor work is over for the day.

No change can be made in the tea-house work, which goes on steadily, and if there has been much leaf brought in the day before, firing will very frequently last from daybreak until well into the night, or small hours of the morning. But we are getting on too fast, and must hark back to the commencement of our work.

Over night the sirdars, or headmen of the garden, arrange the order of plucking for the morrow; first having received instructions from the sahib as to which portion of the garden he thinks ready to be plucked. Each sirdar has a certain number of men or women to look after, and for the hoeing or plucking of these he is responsible. His charges are occasionally very wilful, and pluck according to their own inclinations, instead of carrying out instructions, bringing in coarse leaf when fine only is required, and doing anything to fill their baskets and save a little trouble. A sirdar's mode of management is of the simplest. He parades up and down between the rows of tea bushes, armed with a small stick and the dignity that his position of authority gives him, in and out amongst his pluckers, yelling at the top of his voice, encouraging or swearing at them, and

always inciting them to make haste and get along faster (Che lao ! che lao !). A sirdar attains his proud position through being one of the oldest and most trusted workers on the estate, or for having successfully recruited and brought up a party of coolies from his own country. They are held in respect by the rest of the coolies, for they have the ear of [the sahib, and have it in their power to make it decidedly



WOMAN PLUCKING.

uncomfortable for any individual who sets their authority at defiance.

Early in the morning, after the second gong has rung out the coolies, the women, provided with baskets in which to put the leaf, are marshalled by the sirdars, and directly they have been all got together, are conducted to the part of the garden that is to be plucked. By the time that eleven o'clock comes round, if there is a good flush on the bushes, it is no

unusual thing for them to bring ten seers of leaf each (a seer weighs two pounds)—no light weight to carry about on a hot day.

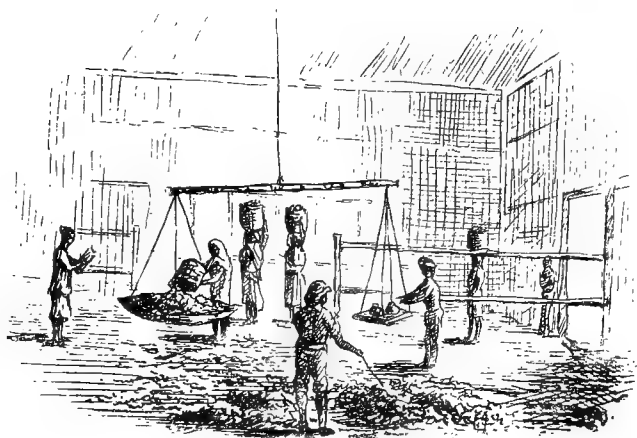
The process of plucking is not nearly so easy as it looks: the plant requires delicate handling, and the knack takes some time to acquire; the difference between an old hand and a beginner is transparent in the quantity and quality of leaf brought to scale. In plucking, the shoots are nipped off by catching the leaves between the forefinger and thumb, then with a quick dexterous turn of the wrist, they are taken off quite clean. If my reader has observed the new growth of a laurel, where it springs out from between the old dark green leaves, he will be able to form a fairly good idea of the appearance presented by a flush on the tea plant. Generally the tip and two or three leaves are taken, if fairly soft; the lowest leaf down the stem being so nipped off that its stalk is left adhering to the main stem, and it is between these two that the new shoot forms, producing in from twelve to fifteen days another flush. A great mistake is made by eager planters in heavy plucking at the commencement of a season. The result of this treatment is to procure very fine teas in quality, pretty to look at when manufactured, and tasty when infused, but limited in quantity; and when the usual period for heavy plucking and a large return ought to have arrived, the plant, weakened by the strain put upon it too early in the season, cannot respond, and is thrown back, remaining during the better part of the year in

a sickly condition. For every ounce of tea made at the beginning of a backward season pounds are lost later on, but it is the laudable ambition of every manager, especially if he is newly appointed, to out-do last year's crop, and in order to accomplish this it is advisable, so he falsely argues, to set to work directly the plants show signs of flushing.

Both men and women are lazy, and require a great deal of looking after. Hot days are conducive to this spirit of idleness, and many small parties of coolies have to be routed out from under the grateful shade of the nearest tree, where they are to be found stowed away, enjoying the rest from toil. The arrangement that women should be plucking in one part of the garden, and men hoeing in another, is the best. At times of pressing necessity—as, for instance, when there is a full flush all over the garden, and it must be all got off as soon as possible (for if left the leaf hardens)—or when the ground takes a larger number of hoeings than can be accomplished by the ordinary set day's work, *ticca pice* (additional wages) are paid as an inducement for both men and women to work. Sometimes even the prospects of an increase to their incomes will not allure these people, so curiously are they constituted ; and the only answer to the question, "Why won't you work for this money?" will be, "Sahib, I have already earned my mother's pay, and that is quite enough to feed me. Why should I put myself out to work for more money that I do not require?" A native troubles not about the future,

for he can always obtain employment, and if the worst comes, his people will support his declining days.

After the leaf has been brought in and weighed, it is thinly spread over bamboo frames, covered with closely-meshed wire netting, each about forty inches by thirty—a nice handy size—and left on racks in a



WEIGHING THE LEAF.

well-ventilated house, and here it goes through the first process of manufacture, viz., withering. This is done in order to render the leaf soft and supple before it is rolled; otherwise, when heavy pressure was put upon it, the leaf, instead of twisting up in one whole roll, would be powdered into tiny fragments. A large amount of space is taken up by this process, sometimes twice as much space being occupied as

would be required on ordinary occasions. These exceptions are, for instance, after heavy rain, or when coarse leaf has been brought in, and it is necessary to spread thinly to facilitate the air circulation round the leaf. Withering will, under usual circumstances, take from ten to twenty hours, occasionally even longer. After rain the process is greatly hindered by the amount of moisture that has to be



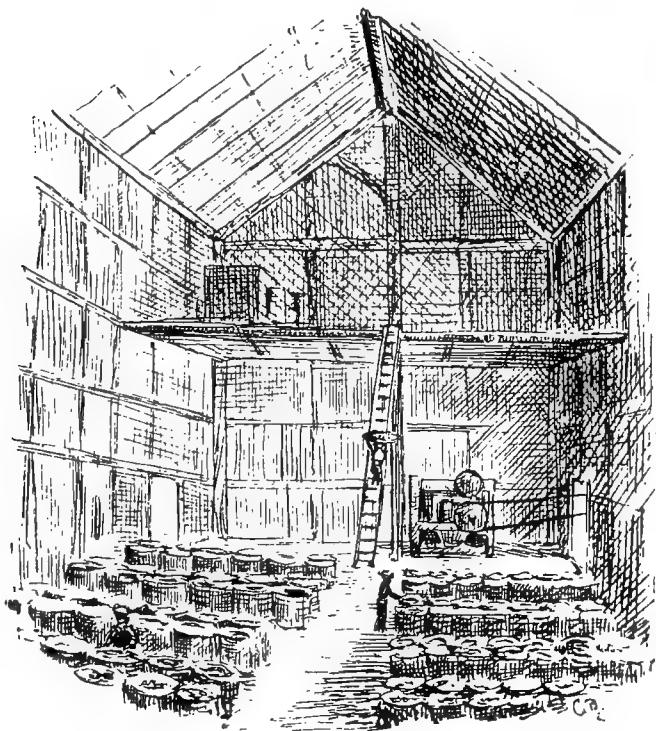
WITHERING HOUSE.

got rid of before withering can commence, rapid evaporation being affected by the condition of atmosphere, temperature, etc. Careful watch has to be kept to prevent over-withering, when the leaf turns a reddish brown, much to the detriment of the tea

that it will make.

The leaf being ready, it is carried in large wicker baskets from the withering to the tea-house, there to undergo its next process, rolling. The interior of a tea-house is simple, rough and unadorned; sometimes the walls are lime-washed, but this is tending towards the luxurious; the fittings consist of the rolling machine, dhools and large tin-lined chest for storing tea. Perhaps if the house is high enough a second story (or chung, as it is locally designated) is erected, composed of bamboos, on which, if the leaf has been

brought in wet, the process of withering is hurried along, with the assistance of the great heat given off from the dhools. A rolling machine is an expensive



TEA-HOUSE.

item for a garden, and figures badly in the capital account, but when at the end of a season a balance is struck between the cost of coolie, or, better still, Assamese, labour and the outlay on a machine it

will require no demonstration to prove that a machine pays for itself in a very short time. It is a willing labourer that does the work as efficiently and ten times more quickly, an incalculable benefit if there is a large supply of leaf in the withering house waiting to be rolled and spoiling by the keeping.

The costliest part of getting machinery sent out from England is the transport between Calcutta and Assam: curiously enough the freight between these points is higher than between Calcutta and England, rather an illogical fact, seeing that one is a seventh or eighth part of the distance of the other.

To facilitate rolling, several patents have been taken out. The best known and most universally adopted are Mr. Jackson's machines. Mr. Jackson was himself a planter of large experience before he commenced engineering, and his knowledge of the requirements for this branch of tea-making has enabled him to construct a machine that meets every wish. Other machines by Mr. Kinman—who, I believe, is also an old planter—have been brought out, and are largely used in a good many gardens, their owners doing all their work with them, and desiring no better. Much depends on the machine that a man is accustomed to use, and opinions will be found to be fairly divided between the two rolling machine makers, every planter swearing by the machine that he is possessed of.

Lately a small, but at the same time most important, change has crept into machinery for tea-

making, the use of as little iron as possible on the plates which come into direct contact with the leaf during the process of rolling, on account of the discoloration which follows. Even heads of iron bolts that screw together the timbers of the rolling table are sunk as deeply as the thickness of wood permits, and covered over. Long experience has proved that the less metal used in tea manufacturing, the better the result obtained ; and now that tea fetches such ridiculously low prices, every attention that is consistent with rapidity of working, must be given to the minutest details, to enable the producer to set before the consumer an article with as few defects in it as practicable.

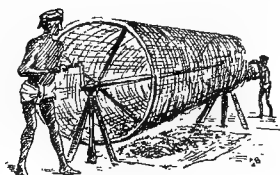
Should a machine unhappily break down in the midst of a heavy season, an occurrence that will happen with the customary perverseness of things, recourse has to be taken to the old method, and rolling has to be performed by hand, for which purpose a large band of coolies have to be taken away from important garden work. It is not until an accident of this sort happens that the change from the old interminable, never-ending drudgery of hand rolling to the rapid machine work is appreciated from the pleasing comparison. A certain amount of finishing of the rough leaf is still done by hand ; there will always be a little coarse stuff left over, not enough to fill up the machine again, that must be done in this way.

According to the capacity of the machine, so much

withered leaf is emptied into it, the wheels revolve, and in a few minutes the rolled leaf is turned out, ready for the next process-fermenting.

Fermentation commences immediately after rolling has finished, and is conducted (or perhaps, more correctly speaking, I ought to say, conducts itself) in the following way. The leaf is collected from the machine and spread in thin layers on mats, and turned over from time to time. Exposure to the air does the rest. The leaf ferments, and during the process a change of colour ensues. First the bright green disappears, which is replaced by a greenish yellow, then follows a dirty yellow, succeeded quickly by a bright copper colour. At this stage, according to most accepted authorities on the subject, the leaf is ready for firing; but about this great differences of opinion prevail, and there has been many a wordy war. Some maintain that the early greenish yellow period of fermentation is the best, and that tea made from leaf of this colour is more pungent; but each planter fancies that his own views are the best, and it is only by the price that his teas fetch in the open market that his faith in his own mode of manufacture can be at all shaken. Really, everything depends on the quality of the leaf, and no hard and fast rules can be laid down for guidance. The coarser and harder kinds of China tea will require more withering, more rolling, and more fermenting, to procure the requisite colour; whereas the soft, large-leaved indigenous or hybrid plant is easier to work.

Directly the process of fermentation has arrived at the particular point required, the leaf is lightly spread on bamboo trays, to be fired. The dhools, on which the bamboo trays are placed, are a kind of rough oven, ranged round the tea-house in rows, standing two feet high and close together, except where a pathway between each double row allows room for a man to pass up and turn the leaf over. Dhools are built circular in shape, of twisted bamboo, bedaubed inside and out with a composition of mud, which quickly hardens. They are fixed to the ground, and a charcoal fire is lighted in the centre of the space occupied by the dhool, while the tray containing the spread-out leaf is placed on the top. By this arrangement the heat is pretty nearly equally diffused over the whole surface of the tray.



REVOLVING SIEVE.

Some planters, after the rolling is finished and before fermentation commences, pass the leaf through a sieve. This machine is home-made, and consists of belts of *bêt*, a species of rattan, twisted round and round long strips of split bamboo, arranged to form a ground work, round which to intertwine the flexible *bêt*. A large circular sieve is thus formed, wider at one end than at the other, and with larger spaces between the bamboos at the wide end than at the small. An axle is run up the centre of this contrivance, on one end of which is fixed a handle, the

whole thing being mounted on rough bearings, to allow the sieve to revolve. Leaf taken from the rolling machine is passed through the sieve while it rotates, with the result that the finer leaf is separated. This can only be done on a very rough scale, but the machine answers all the purposes required of it.

Among the men engaged in tea-firing, a system of continual change week by week is often compulsory, although there is serious fault to be found with this arrangement, seeing that (putting aside all considerations of the ill-effects wrought upon the coolie by continually living in the hottest part of the tea-house, without a change to outdoor work, in order to recuperate his relaxed condition), an enormous inconvenience arises in having to teach a number of coolies the same work over and over again. Just as they are becoming proficient in tea-making, they have to return to their hoes, and by the time that it comes round to their turn again for tea-house work their hand has lost its cunning. Larger pay is an inducement to a few to stick to tea-house work, and a party of these industrious workers will be told off for duty, one half of the number taking three days a week inside and four days out, and *vice versa*. None of the imported coolies could stand seven consecutive days at this trying labour. Even at their best Bengalis cannot compare as tea-makers with Assamese, all of whom seem to be born adepts at the industry. It is real economy, if it can be effected, to secure the services

of two or three Assamese in the tea-house, and pay them twice as much as an ordinary coolie, for they are well worth the money. They understand what is required, work well, and seem to stand the heat better.

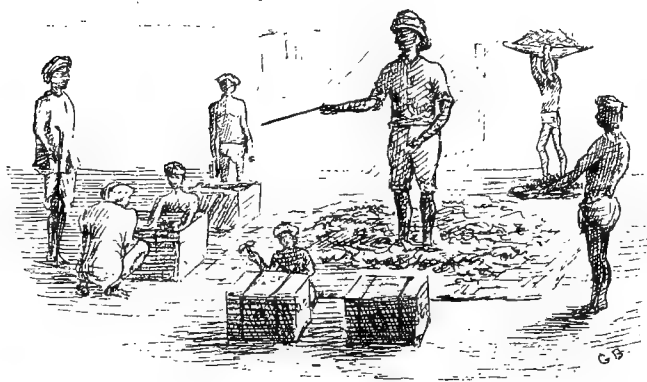
Charcoal must be carefully selected before use in tea-firing, otherwise the bad bits smoke and impart an unpleasant flavour to the leaf on the tray above. The heat in the house after the dhools have been alight some time is terribly trying, the thermometer usually ranging between 110° and 130° Fahr. Entering a tea-house, some little practice is required to be able at a glance round to detect the particular dhool that is smoking or burning. Coming from the outside (I was nearly writing "fresh" air, but that would not be in strict accordance with my love of veracity), the smell of burnt tea is apparent at once. Awful difficulties are experienced with Bengalis before driving into their dense brains the idea that the leaf must be constantly turned over, so that every portion shall get the benefit of the fire. If not carefully looked after they will leave the tea to its fate; and if one dhool of burnt tea, by some mischance, escapes the lynx-eyed planter, and is allowed to be mixed with the rest, the labours of many days are irrevocably damaged for the Calcutta market.

The fired tea has now assumed the appearance that it presents on our breakfast tables in England: a blue-black with a quantity of little silvery white threads mixed with it. These thread-like shoots are finest pekoe—the most valuable portion of the tea

Red leaf—of which there will always be a small proportion, however carefully the manufacture may have been conducted—is picked out, and the whole of the day's tea is weighed, and stored away in a capacious tin-lined box, there to remain until there is a sufficient quantity to pick, pack, and send away. Suppose this time to have arrived. Women are set to work (for all this portion of the work is done by females) to sort out the rough leaf from the fine, and the red leaf from both ; the tea is then passed through various sized wire sieves, and quality and quantity are afterwards noted on the outside of the box that carries it, or by some private mark, for future reference. Nearly all the tea-chests used in Assam are made in Burmah : each piece is numbered, and then tied in a flat parcel for convenience of transit. When put together at the factory they look much nicer, and are in the end cheaper, than the home-made article ; for cutting timber, unless a saw-mill with plenty of suitable wood is at hand, does not pay.

Now comes the last stage of all in our account of the tea manufacture—packing. Boxes, lined with sheet-lead, are weighed and placed ready in the tea-house ; all the tea that is about to be packed is re-fired over tremendously hot dhools, in order to get rid of any moisture that may be retained, and which on the voyage would probably spoil the whole chest, causing it to go musty. While it is still hot it is put into the chests, shaken down (pressing it down with the hands would reduce it to powder), and weighed ;

then the lead lining is soldered down as rapidly as possible, the weight of the box and net weight stamped on the outside, lid nailed down, the garden's private mark, together with number of the break, put in a conspicuous place, and our tea is ready for its journey. The whole business is done with a smartness unusual to the native ; but the sahib's presence, watch in hand, personally surveying the busy scene,

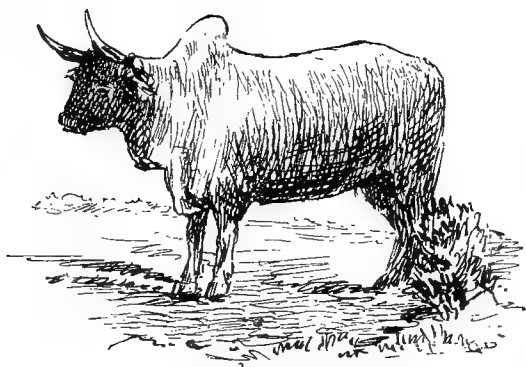


PACKING TEA.

and exciting the coolies with promises of a reward to the men who pack the quickest, stimulates them to increased exertions.

Each bullock ghari will take for shipment seven or eight chests to the river, where they await the first steamer going down stream. During the rains there is frequent difficulty in securing a sufficient

number of gharis to take away the tea, for the ordinary supply of the garden is utterly inefficient at this busy period to dispose of all the chests, and ticca (or hired) gharis are speedily snapped up. Factories situated close to an arm or tributary of the Brahmapootra are at this time in a capital situation, and can put their tea on a small flat and float the whole thing down to the main stream, at much less expense than



ASSAM BULL.

others who have not the advantages of a waterway.

Among the many inconveniences that surround the planter, and are calculated to sour his temper, is the damage caused to tea bushes by cows and ponies. Blight is a visitation that no human power can foresee or resist, but ponies and cows are wanderers let loose from the nearest habitations, and can be dealt with. For many years it was customary to catch all cows, horses, buffalo, etc., found straying about the garden

and (acting under a *lex non scripta*) put them in the pound, where they remained until claimed by their owners, on whom, as a warning, a small fine (four or eight annas) was imposed. Private pounds are now illegal, unless duly authorised by the nearest assistant commissioner, and all stray animals are driven to the Government pound. The trouble that this causes, the pound being probably twenty or thirty miles distant, the loss of the services of two coolies to act as drovers for two or three days, the hatred and malice that is borne against you all round your district for taking such action, does not compensate for the pleasure of depriving an Assamese ryot of his own, and putting him to the trouble of going in search of his missing property. On the road a party of Assamese will meet their animals being driven away to the nearest station, to be placed in durance vile; then with many entreaties and by payment of fines they will regain them, leaving the unclaimed cows to continue their weary tramp. What these wretched, half-starved brutes manage to find to eat in a tea garden is a mystery, for as fast as the jungle grows up, it is promptly hoed into the ground again. They greatly damage the plants by rubbing their irritable bodies against the branches, or vary the monotony with a fight, during which the bushes are trampled down and rushed through, crushing down the young growth and unfitting the plant for yielding for a lengthened period. Coolies own many cows and ponies, and are chief offenders in the damage done to a garden.

Buffalo are also trespassers to be prosecuted; fortunately they are scarcer than cows and ponies. but such clumsy, awkward brutes do not help to improve the condition of a plantation. Young nurseries are the chief sufferers after an incursion of these animals: their great flat feet tread down two or three young plants at each step, and in one night incalculable harm can be effected. Instead of pounding them, a good plan is to make them work for their living, and when their owners come to claim them, impose a heavy fine in addition. A capital revenge was taken by my partner for depredations committed. A few buffalo were found straggling about the garden, which he promptly impounded. About this time he was building a tea-house, and there was a difficulty in procuring good thatch, and some doubt on his mind of the ability of the Bengalis to thatch his house properly; so being a man of many resources, when the owners of the buffalo turned up, they were politely but firmly informed that the only possible way of getting back their property was to thatch the tea-house; a proposition at which they at first demurred: but finding that my friend meant exactly what he had said, there was no way out of it but to set to work and do it. Thus we had our house well thatched, and they had their animals restored, a most satisfactory arrangement, I hope, to all parties concerned.

CHAPTER VII.

COOLIES AND THEIR TROUBLESOME WAYS—HOW THEY ARE PROCURED—THE AGREEMENT (TERMS OF)—PAYMENT STIPULATED AND SERVICE FOR A CERTAIN TERM OF YEARS—THE COOLIE PROTECTOR—COOLIES ON THEIR TRAVELS—INEFFICIENCY OF GOVERNMENT ARRANGEMENTS—COOLIE FESTIVITIES AND ROWS—PAY-DAY—LOVE OF DRINK.

AH me! what a host of past troubles that one little word "coolie" conjures up! The climate is not all that one could desire, the insects are infamous; the coolie is worse than either, and makes the two former feeble by comparison with his own powers of inflicting torture. The secret of success in a planter's life, after starting a good garden, is to have a temper that nothing can ruffle, and to avoid seeking after the somewhat desultory pleasures and follies of civilized life at the nearest station, endeavouring thereby to put on one side garden worries. By keeping these principles in view, and allowing nothing to cause a disturbance of serenity and equanimity, a planter can hope to enter on his varied duties, equal at all points to the coolie; but let him be especially provided with the latter's particular mainstay—a phlegmatic in-

difference to everything and everybody. Lengthy personal acquaintance with their idiosyncrasies is the only means of getting to understand their management, and it is simply ridiculous to hear the remarks made by people in England, as to how they would alter the existing arrangements and change the management of affairs, if they had anything to do with natives. There is no similarity on any one point in the two modes of looking after European and Eastern labour, nor will any amount of theorizing be able to break through the intensely practical manner in which natives have had to be dealt with for the last one hundred and fifty years.

All difficulties notwithstanding, coolies have to be brought to the gardens to work for the planter, and it is concerning the troubles of both master and man that this chapter shall be devoted.

In the first place, when procuring coolies, two courses are open—either to recruit, or obtain them through the Government agents in Calcutta. The first way is only capable of being worked if the garden has been established for a considerable period, when there are men of a certain standing whom the sahib can trust to go away to their own country and return again. Naturally there is great eagerness displayed amongst those who can claim to have been sufficiently long on the garden to be among the selected to go on a recruiting expedition, and at the first intimation to the sirdars that some two or three men will be required for this purpose, all those present

themselves who have established any pretensions to be considered trustworthy; besides many others, who boast of innumerable friends in their own village over whom they possess great influence, which they need but exert to probably persuade at least two or three hundred relatives and acquaintances to accompany them back at the conclusion of their successful campaign. Having selected, with judgment, the recruiters, their expenses are given them for travelling to their own district; meanwhile ordinary pay continues, and in addition they are allowed a bonus of so much (according to an arrangement or a fixed garden tariff) per head on all coolies brought up. They will be away for four or five months, during which space of time they are supposed to use all their powers of eloquence to induce friends to accompany them back to Assam, doubtlessly pointing out the exhilarating effects of cultivating the tea plant, the enormous fortunes to be acquired by industrious coolies, and to what an improved position they can hope to aspire; but forgetting to mention the deadly climate, the miseries of being in a strange country, and other drawbacks. During a season of great drought, which in India means famine and pestilence, recruiters have no difficulty in securing as many labourers as they require; but at other times, when there have been good seasons and an abundance of rice has been harvested, nothing will beguile the Bengali from his native land, and recruiters must put forth their most strenuous exertions, telling stories that cannot be quite veracious, before

they can induce even the discontented fellow who wishes to travel and see the world, to try his fortunes in the land of tea. Now and then a recruiter disappears: then it dawns upon the planter that his confidence was misplaced, that he has—vexatious thought—paid a coolie's travelling expenses to go to his own country, from which he had not when he started off the slightest intention of returning. A sad waste of money; but, fortunately for the trusting nature of mankind, this does not occur frequently.

A recruiter who has found his men returns with them to his garden, assumes a higher place, has his pay raised, and bears himself like the successful man that he is, looking forward with certainty to the time when he shall again be paid for five or six months' idleness.

The other mode of obtaining coolies for the garden is through a Government agent in Calcutta. This way of getting together labour is not unfrequently resorted to when there is an immediate requirement to fill up the vacant places of men whose agreements have expired and have gone away, or if opening out a new garden. Government agents procure their men by a regular system of recruiting established throughout the thickly-populated districts (some people unkindly say that the business bears an uncommonly near resemblance to kidnapping), so that the supply hardly ever runs short in a case of emergency. The great drawback to this method of furnishing a garden with labour is the expense; for the cost of this way

of doing business compares very unfavourably with the first mentioned. A general calculation, which is in no way excessive, puts the present price of an individual coolie, duly landed by the Government agents at the nearest point of disembarkation on the river to the scenes of his future labours, at about ninety rupees a head. When, therefore, it is necessary to procure a batch of eighty or one hundred men at a time, the initiatory expense is considerable and unsatisfactory. It is a preposterous price to pay, when the fact is considered that it would give the agents a handsome profit, after landing the coolies at their destination, to charge fifty rupees a man ; but planters continue to be very long-suffering, and slow to combine together to present a front against the many standing abuses.

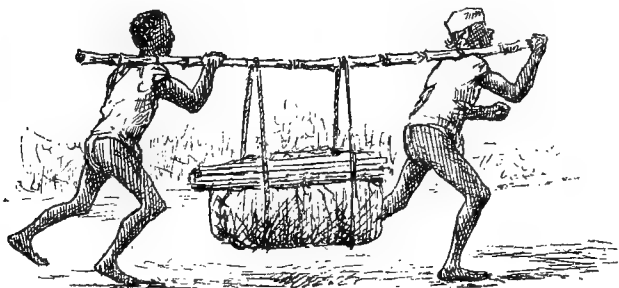
The agreement entered into between coolies and garden proprietors used to provide for three years' service, but now, since I left Assam, extends over five. It was necessary, and in favour of the employer, to make an alteration in the three years' system, on account of the comparative shortness of the term ; for a man at the end of three years, who had become inured to the climate and was well up in all garden work, just at the very time his services were beginning to be valuable and repay the money spent on his bringing up, was, by his agreement, entitled to claim his discharge. He then either went home, or more probably, if he had any desire to accumulate wealth (a rare occurrence amongst coolies), entered into a fresh

agreement with another planter at a higher rate of pay ; for, inasmuch as he was posted up in his work and was acclimatised, he became a valuable property. Great feeling exists amongst the planting fraternity on the question of the admissibility of hiring coolies who have come from a garden that is close at hand. It seems indeed unfair that a man who has been put to no expense in bringing up the labour should be able, by the promise of an additional rupee a month to their pay, to entice away from his neighbour several time-expired coolies. On this account itinerant coolies who proffer their services have their antecedents carefully inquired into, letters (or "chits," as they are styled) are exchanged between the old and would-be proprietor, in order that no misunderstanding may afterwards arise between them, for it is reckoned, and justly so, a most heinous crime to entice away or employ another's labourers without his cognisance and consent to the arrangement. Try to imagine for one instant the result on the community of each planter working entirely in a selfish spirit, and inducing his neighbour's coolies to throw up their present employer at the end of their agreements. Life, under such circumstances, would be unbearable. Every man justly suspicious of his neighbour, the small amenities of existence would cease to be, and each planter's daily occupation would be to scheme how best to keep his own coolies and how to gain over his friend's, if such a term could exist. Now there is a kindly neighbourly feeling, and no planter entertains an idea

of employing men who come to him haphazard, without first finding out the exact reason for quitting their last garden; and frequently, if they have displayed any ill-feeling, their would-be employer will have nothing to do with them, out of respect to their former master.

The agreement sets forth that, while in force, five rupees a month shall be paid to the males, that rice shall be supplied from the garden at three rupees a maund; and there are other minor conditions referring to the amount of labour to be imposed, etc., which at this stage are not of much consequence. The clause concerning the sale of rice has always proved the most difficult one to deal with. No doubt the idea in inserting this stipulation was to protect the coolie in case of famine, or in the event of some other influence causing the price of grain to rise, and in its general purport is a most humane provision. The loss entailed by the cultivator of a large plantation, where hundreds of hands are employed, is enormous whenever the prices happen to go up. In 1879 prices rose on account of the general failure of the crop, and at the end of the season all the gardens had heavy losses to face; one, indeed, had to write off as much as £2,000 to loss on sale of rice. This is, of course, very hard upon the planter, especially at the present time, when the tea market is in such a deplorable condition that even with favourable circumstances it is difficult to make receipts and expenditure balance. An incumbrance like this thrust upon him does much to discourage an industry

by which that same Government that has exacted so much from him, bound him down so tightly, and given so little in return, profits immensely. However, it is one of the questions that is most difficult to meet, a problem whose solution will be thankfully accepted by the planter. Some gardens are situated at such a distance from the rice districts or the river, our highway of traffic, that ghari hire



COOLIES CARRYING RICE.

adds immensely to the value of the grain, and it is especially on the owners of these outlying plantations that the loss falls with additional severity.

Coolies do not trouble the garden for rice when prices rule low, but trot off every Sunday morning to procure their week's stock at the nearest hat (native market); directly prices rise above three rupees a maund, the garden is at once requisitioned, and no matter whether there is any in stock or not, rice has to be forthcoming at the stipulated price. A sudden fluctuation in the market price, if sustained for a time,

has a serious effect on the profits for the year. Few gardens having any accommodation for the storage of grain in large quantities, and when it can be bought cheaply against a coming bad season, it has to be transported speedily from long distances, at an immense outlay.

A functionary (of the duality I am not certain) has been appointed to look after the welfare and inquire into the treatment of the labourer in Assam, who delights in the appellation of 'coolie protector.' Amongst a certain section of the rough and ready fraternity, men who value a coolie on the principle that the immortal Mr. Gradgrind did his "hands," this gentleman's services are very desirable, and without doubt, the improvement in the coolie's condition, from a humanitarian point of view, tends to raise his working capabilities for the benefit of his taskmaster. That a protector is really required now that a different class of men has taken the place of the old planters is another question, but the powers that be, viewing the state of things through maternal spectacles, see in the present race of planters only the successors of planters that have gone before, inheritors of all their faults and vices (for they had a very bad name). Quite enough that we shall be tarred with the same brush. Now, is it not ridiculous to suppose that owners would wilfully maltreat their servants, knowing that everything depends upon their being in a good state of health, coupled with an amount of willingness, sufficient, at any rate,

to complete a Governmentally prescribed day's work?

No; the interest in the health of the garden labourers cannot give way to the private feelings of a manager, much as he would like at times to point an argument with a sound thrashing, yet the knowledge of the loss of a man's labour for the ensuing week acts as a powerful deterrent, and feelings of vindictiveness have to be sacrificed to general interests.

Of the way in which the coolie protector, whom I had the pleasure of meeting, carried out his disagreeable duties, no commendation can be too high. A more courteous, kindly gentleman does not exist, but his official position is a questionable boon both to himself and his fellows. It is pretty certain that his visits, which occur about once every six months, create a bad effect amongst those in whose interests he appears, and a management that may have been very successful in establishing a good feeling between master and men is unhinged for a time by the semblance of a doubt being thrown upon the general happy tone that had hitherto prevailed. When everything is working smoothly—a highly to be desired state of affairs, and not so frequently brought about that an opportunity for strengthening it can be overlooked—it is undesirable, to say the least, to have anyone on the garden questioning the men concerning the treatment that they have received, and stirring up in their naturally suspicious minds grave doubts of their having been as well dealt by as they

deserved. The sanitary condition of their dwellings, the purity of the drinking water, rate of mortality, etc., are surely things that must much more closely concern the owner than any Government official.

On page eleven of Colonel Money's book on Tea* (a work that I devoured with much eagerness before leaving England), will be found most interesting reading on this same subject, written by a man of larger and more varied experience than the present writer's.

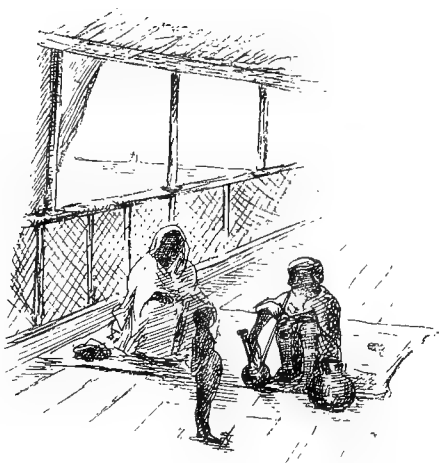
Given the loss of ten or a dozen men in a year through bad drainage, or some other preventable causes, on whom does the cost, say 900 rupees, of bringing them up country fall? Losses like this would speedily open the eyes of any man to the consciousness that it is cheaper at the beginning to be careful of the drainage, and to do away with the cause for such mortality. At the end of each year, a printed blank form is sent round to every planter, and it is required of him to send in a true report, duly filled up and signed, of the number of births, marriages, and deaths amongst the coolies, how many have left, and how many new arrivals there are, etc.—necessary, I suppose, for census purposes.

The mode of conveying coolies up country is by steamer. A party of two or three hundred will, at certain intervals, leave Calcutta, despatched by the Government contractor to their various destinations, under the charge of a doctor, whose duty it is to accompany them throughout the whole of their

* London : Whittingham & Co. Calcutta : Thacker, Spink & Co.

voyage, until the last man is landed. They are sent overland to Goalundo by rail; there they join the steamer and proceed up country. Arrangements for their reception are always complete, every vessel on this line being fitted up for carrying at least two hundred. The after part of the upper deck is reserved for their accommodation (?): and here they are huddled together in a shameful fashion when there happens, as is of too frequent occurrence, to be an excessive number on board. Luckily they do not travel equipped each with a bulky portmanteau, or the space would not suffice for one half the number; their paraphernalia is of the simplest description—a blanket, a lotah (brass pot), a hubble-bubble, and a small parcel done up in a handkerchief, containing chunam and betel-nut, a comb (if the party is proud of his or her personal appearance), and one or two other trifles dear to the Bengali's heart. The family of three or four will take up their quarters by laying the blankets, stretched out one over the other—a protest against trespassers. Each family, or party, then occupies a space of about five feet square. On this location they will squat about until it is time to retire for the night; then the blankets are distributed, and five minutes after this ceremony has been observed it would puzzle a faquir to be able to recognise that bundle as a man or a woman, or the smaller balls of blanket as children. There they lie huddled up close to one another, though the night be ever so hot, extending all the way down each side of the

deck and two rows up the centre, allowing barely sufficient room for a passer-by to avoid treading on some part of them. During the day-time they chat together in groups, play a game of chance—for they are terrible gamblers—smoke, or more often sit stolidly, doing nothing ; but when the vessel stops, a few are given leave to go ashore to cook their food



COOLIES ON BOARD.

(caste prevents some from cooking anywhere but on land), or to buy vegetables, fruit, betel-nut, or anything else that they may want ; while those on board fish over the stern of the boat, endeavouring to add to their scanty stock-pot.

The women, of whom there is always a fair sprinkling in every batch, take more pride in their

appearance than the men. This they manifest by the care with which they will arrange their hair, the gaudy-coloured raiment, the gaudier the better, that they affect, and the enormous silver or brass bangles studding their arms and ankles. Love of finery usually takes the form of bangles or earrings. Both of these articles of adornment assume gigantic dimensions; indeed, some of the bangles would compare favourably in size with the studded collar of a full-grown bull dog, and is about as massively made. It is a handy way of carrying their wealth, seeing that they do not possess pockets in which to carry rupees; but there a difficulty crops up when an outlay of money has to be made and a bangle must be realised, for the ladies are loth to part with their ornaments, notwithstanding that sometimes on one arm there will be ten or fifteen bangles, together weighing, I should roughly guess, five or six pounds. English ladies would be somewhat astonished if they were requested to put on one of the ornaments worn by these beauties of the East, and considering in what demand this kind of decoration was a short time ago, it is a wonder that genuine specimens, with their wealth of solid silver, never reached England. The carriage of the women is very erect, the result of bearing all heavy weights on the head, but a curious swaying of the body, and feet planted wide apart, renders their walk by no means a graceful movement in the eyes of Europeans.

On board, a barber is kept to shave the men, an

operation in which they seem to take an especial delight ; many of them have not only all hair shaved off the face, but also off the head, with the exception of one small tuft, that appears to be left for the satisfaction of any other gentleman who may develop a fancy for exercising his skill at scalping. The different styles of arranging the hair is often an outward signification of caste, and judging by the varied modes to be met with, the castes must be numberless. Concerning this interesting point, I was never able, much to my chagrin, to obtain any accurate information. Between the man who has all his hair shaved off and the head of matted hair guiltless of comb, unkempt, uncut, and plaited down the back in two long tails, that present a greasy uncomfortable



TWO HEADS OF HAIR.

appearance, there are many intermediary stages of *coiffure* ; these two, however, may be considered as the Alpha and Omega of native hair-dressing.

The coolies' food and tobacco are measured out to them, on a fixed scale, by the doctor in charge. A large pot boils all the rice at once, in order to save many fires being lighted at different points and their attendant risk to the vessel. The doctor, if tolerably strict, has an easy time of it ; the only trouble that perpetually haunts him is a perverse habit of dying

that Bengalis have, to which the doctor strongly objects on the ground of its diminishing his income. For each coolie landed alive, the disciple of Æsculapius receives one and a half rupees ; for every woman, one rupee ; for a child, eight annas ; so it is to his interest that they should be able to hang on to life until off his hands. This system of paying has given rise to queer stories of the tricks adopted by certain worthy members of the profession : some of them have put on shore men in a moribund condition, but fortified to such an extent with rum, that they have been passed by the receiving agent as in good condition, an unexpected verdict that enabled the doctor to go on his way, rejoicing in having received his grant by the merest possible shave. At two or three important stations along the river, doctors are appointed to board all steamers with a complement of coolies for passengers, to examine into their state of health, to inspect the sanitary arrangements for their comfort, their food, etc. When the examination is completed, the visiting doctor certifies that, up to this stage of the journey, all is well, and hands the certificate of indemnification to the doctor in charge, who produces it, if called upon, at the next examining station.

It would be a noble work if Government facilitated the traffic of these poor wretches up the river from Calcutta. They are often wedged in, on a small dirty steamer, so closely that all idea of a healthy atmosphere is out of the question ; the thoughts of the moral effects are never considered. But what is

to be done? The visiting doctor can in no way alleviate their sufferings, for though the ship may be excessively overcrowded, the next steamer will not be due for another week, and in the meantime, if the coolies were put on shore, what would become of them? I have frequently thought, if some fearful epidemic were to break out on a coolie boat during its passage, how many would be landed alive? No; there are several screws loose in the system of immigration, which require an immense amount of rectifying, and the sooner a commission of inquiry, or some less ponderous and more quickly moved body, is appointed to examine into the existing shortcomings of the present working of the system, the better for all parties. Taking into account the fact that the traffic in coolies is a very lucrative business to the Government, there really is no reason why matters should not be improved, both for the coolies' comfort, by way of a more rapid service, and for the planter, by a diminished charge for each labourer. Immigration, with lower charges, would receive every encouragement, and many a poor Bengali would be enabled to go up country on his own account, with the certainty of procuring a livelihood, a hard enough task to accomplish in his own country, where the whole place teems with people. In thus encouraging willing labourers to be independent, and to seek for their own means of obtaining a livelihood, the authorities would benefit the whole Indian race, and prevent those disastrous famines that are for ever

recurring, besides assisting an industry in which voluntary labourers are badly wanted. Surely this is not a very enormous demand to make upon the Government, to help an industry that has been undertaken with private capital, and has done much for the trade and good of the country, and to encourage a healthy spirit of self-reliance amongst the natives by opening out a new field for their energies.

The change of climate has often a disastrous effect on newly imported coolies. It takes months before they get thoroughly acclimatised (unless in the meantime they perversely die) and learn their work—the latter not the least important consideration to their owners. For the first few weeks after their arrival they have no idea how to do any of the garden-work or make themselves useful, but they squat about aimlessly, pictures of utter wretchedness. Native mechanics, skilled in building, carpentering, etc., cost a great deal to bring up country, and ask for high wages before they will start; but they must be employed, in order to instruct the others how to work, unless the sahib can dispense with their services, and show men himself how to handle their tools. With a little looking after and practice, some of the coolies turn out fair carpenters, although they are slow to learn, and unretentive of anything that may have been explained to them but a day before. No persuasion can induce them to use tools in the same way as European. Sawing, planing—everything is done in a back-handed way; and it strikes anyone who sees

the men at work as an uncommonly awkward business.

Coolie management is the planter's worst trouble. All the other work is of a most pleasing kind, but coolie-driving rapidly multiplies a manager's grey hairs. Scarcely a day passes but there is some row in the lines, whereupon the jemadar (head man in the lines) brings up the delinquents on the following morning to the bungalow, with a view to getting at the true cause of the disturbance, and the punishment of the evil-doer. The sahib acts as judge and jury, and sits in judgment, listening to the evidence brought forward ; or more correctly speaking, endeavouring to listen, as the prisoner, plaintiff, and the witnesses on both sides talk their loudest ; and all at the same time. The jemadar makes "confusion worse confounded," exerting himself by dint of yells, threats, and the free application of a stick, to silence the whole party and state what he knows of the case—usually not very much. When silence has been procured, an effect never accomplished until everyone has had his or her full say, and there is no more breath left in the bodies of the conflicting parties, contradictory statements are carefully sifted, and a decision given on the general aspect of the case ; for it is impossible to believe one word that a native utters in an affair of this kind. Some very complicated cases frequently arise, in which a hasty decision would cause great dissatisfaction amongst the coolies. Diplomacy is much needed, therefore, to arrange the verdict with a

view to everyone's satisfaction. Between chelans (a name given to each batch of coolies that arrive together, and who, during the time that they are on the same garden, stand by each other) feuds constantly break out, either arising from jealousy or some trifling insult offered to an individual member which the whole of his chelan resents. Again, between the castes there are the same rows, but religious disputes nearly always result in much more revengeful and sanguinary terminations. It is in quarrels of this kind that all the diplomatic skill of the sahib has to be displayed ; a responsibility of no mean kind rests with him, when the result of the arrangement is considered. A decision that does not meet with the views of one side will often cause the whole party on the first available opportunity, or when their agreements are up, to refuse to renew them and leave the garden, a dilemma in which no amount of persuasion or promises of increased pay in the future will effect a reversal of their decision, if the party has really determined to move off. As a chelan will sometimes number thirty or forty men, women and children, the loss is a serious one, and when a quarrel arises between a large and a small party, justice becomes very blind indeed, except to her own interests, and the decision is generally in favour of numbers. Many years of close observation can be passed while living in their midst, without obtaining much of an insight into the way in which the native's mind works ; his mental arguments for compassing some desired result ; the

small centre of ambition on which his whole thoughts are balanced ; and every little thing that, unaccountably, seems to affect him.

Another source of difficulty is to persuade them to renew their agreements (Assamese, "*bundibus*"). Some of the better disposed will make no fuss when their time is up ; but among the low castes, of which the garden labour is mainly composed, a sense of their own importance, and the impossibility of being able to dispense with their services, prevails, causing them to give as much trouble as they possibly can before signing a new *bundibus*. Long separation from their relations' sweet society, a longing to return to their own country, illness or perverseness, and a thousand and one things, make the renewal of agreements a time of suffering for the planter. A book is kept, in which is recorded the fatal days when the agreement of each man on the estate will have to be renewed, and the owner shudders as he turns over its leaves. At the expiration of the first three years a new agreement is drawn up and signed, generally for one year, unless the coolie wants money immediately to liquidate his debts, for in this weakness he is like his betters, well contented to glide into debt and there remain until the small storekeeper in the village, his one creditor, weary of waiting and promises of payment not fulfilled, makes it uncomfortable for him by presenting himself at the bungalow on pay-day and explaining the whole matter to the sahib. If his debts exceed one year's bonus (fifteen rupees) he will probably sign

for two years, and with any small balance that may be left over after the arrangement of his financial difficulties, he will purchase rum shrub and get uproariously drunk. In this blissful condition he will continue, while his money holds out, then back to work, a sadder and more headachy man, content to toil through one more year before he can again eat the bread of idleness for any lengthened period.

It is only when in the transition state from the end of one term of agreement to the commencement of another, that three or four successive days' holiday is given up entirely to their worst nature, not but there is a certain amount of debauchery on every native holiday, and on our Sunday, when all work, except firing, ceases, to enable the purchase of the week's stores at the hat. After marketing is over, the remainder of the day is given up to nautches and carousing. On Monday the effects are apparent, a bad muster, many down with sickness; and as for those that do turn out, the greater number are utterly unable to stand the sun and complete their full amount of work. Monday is always a bad day, especially if the sun should be particularly strong: in that case Tuesday also has a large return of coolies laid up by illness of some sort. They unquestionably lean towards a too ardent admiration for strong waters, and will do any amount of extra work if there is a bottle of rum at the other end of it. For an additional few annas, the value of the rum, they would not undertake an hour's labour beyond the regulation quantity. At

times of a heavy flush or backward state of cultivation, when something must be done to increase the labour power of the garden, brandy or rum—the more fiery the better—is the only inducement that can be held out, where money fails to succeed. Their mode of taking it is to pour it out and drink it off neat ; water would only deprive it of its chief virtue—its fieriness. A native can drink off a tumbler full of raw spirit without stopping to draw breath ; nor does he show any outward signs of being in the least discomforted.

Rarely a night passes in the lines but there is some form of festivity going on, to celebrate either a marriage or a birth. At the season of the native holidays and on Sunday the din is terrific, five or six tum-tums all going at once, mixed with a varied assortment of discordant wails and the perpetual monotony of the curious droning noise, that forms the basis of all native minstrelsy. This hullabaloo (I know no other more appropriate term), kept up without a lull until two or three in the morning, forms a charming accompaniment to a restless night. Continual tum-tumming in the lines is at first, to the uninitiated, a source of maddening annoyance ; I cannot imagine any more exasperating noise to a



TUM-TUMMER.

musical man. Singing, nautching, and drinking. pleasantly pass away the spare time and holidays of the native. Happily these amusements are confined to their own quarters, except on one or two occasions, as, for instance, their new year's day (Behu), when the best nautchers are sent up the bungalow to display their skill and demand backsheesh. A nautch is impossible of description, no pen can describe the weird, wild, creepy sensation that steals over a European watching for the first time these strange people, twisting, writhing, wriggling about, to the sound of the most unearthly forms of music, the tum-tum always the chief offender.

On pay-day, after work is over, men, women, and children—in fact, all the coolies, present themselves, attired in their best, outside the bungalow or wherever the ceremony of paying is to be performed. They are called up by name and in rotation to receive their wages; a few have part of their money cut for idleness or insubordination, but with these exceptions all receive their pay in full and depart happily. Illness makes no difference, and pay goes on just the same. On a hot muggy evening none but those that have been present on a coolies' pay-day can imagine the tainted condition of the atmosphere surrounding three or four hundred coolies; but such things, perchance, had best be left unsaid.

The purchase of cows is one of the recognised modes of investing money or getting rid of superfluous wealth, but it does not often happen that a

coolie finds himself in this dilemma. During my stay there was a murrain amongst the coolies' cattle, for which, by the way, so long as it was confined to the coolies' cattle, we were thankful, as their number had increased to such an extent, that we were constantly lighting upon some wandering through the garden and committing sad havoc amongst the plants. The poor animals suffered fearfully from what was locally

called small-pox; but to detail the form that the malady assumed would be too much for my reader, and make him feel uncomfortable. Down dropped the cows all over the garden, died where they fell, after terrible sufferings, and were, in ordinary Eastern fashion, duly interred in the interior or jackals and vultures. The

loss to the coolies must have represented a large money value, for all knowledge of how to treat the disease remained undiscovered, and it was simply a question of time whether, at the cessation of the epidemic, any animals would be left alive. For milking purposes, the Indian cow is far behind her English namesake; a pint of milk a day is considered a fair quantity. But up country cows



A DOORGA.

can be sometimes bought, at a stiff price, that will give two or three quarts.

When the disease had run its course, the natives made poojahs, offering up sacrifices to appease the wrath of their offended gods. This was the occasion for more noise than I ever heard before. They outdid themselves. In order that their deities shall be thoroughly propitiated, natives adopt no half measures to gain their ends, but will go through an amount of self-denial that would make a good Christian deeply thoughtful. If they have saved any money, every penny will be disbursed for the purchase of sacrificial animals, or to give to the priests. If they have no money, they will borrow two or three months' pay in advance, so as not to be behind with their offerings. A poojah or a marriage will reduce a man to the estate of a beggar for a year or two; but he is quite happy in his poverty.

Superstition and love of drink are the two curses of the native. An instance of a curious performance arising from superstition comes before me at this moment. On a beautiful moonlight evening we were lounging, as was our wont, on the verandah of the bungalow, when the jemadar, accompanied by three of the head sirdars, approached, with profound salaams, in a great state of consternation. It took us some little time, spent in excited explanations on the part of our visitors, before we found that the cause of all this bobbery was a partial eclipse of the moon. The jemadar with pantomimic action, pointed out that

that spot on the moon meant disease, death, and all sorts of impending evils, and that the only way to checkmate the fearful omen was to dispel it by firing off a gun. They solemnly assured us that if we would lend them a weapon, with some powder—it did not appear that shot was requisite—they would soon put things straight; and with the reservation that this ceremony had best be carried out some distance away from our thatched bungalow, they retired to the lines, where we presently heard them tum-tumming and banging away to their hearts' content. The eclipse soon passed over, and "shooting the moon" had been successful. In England this expression is used with an entirely different signification, but the moral that it conveys in its performance is not quite so beautiful as the results achieved by my superstitious Indian friends. Gunpowder is always much sought after, on account of the difficulty that they have in procuring it. An Assamese will borrow a gun and some powder from the sahib, go off shooting, and bring back as a present three-fourths of the spoils, retaining the other fourth for his own *cuisine*. Their style of shooting is of cockney order. They will mark down their bird from behind a tree or bush, then stalk him stealthily, and shoot him as he sits. If he were to rise, that bird would come to no harm, for the marksman would not risk powder and shot on the chance. Even the most wary birds lose their lives to sportsmen of this class; and hornbills, parrots, and green pigeons, all of which are difficult for any European to get

a shot at, are brought to bag by the quiet-footed Assamese.

But to return to our coolie bothers. Government has recently hit upon a novel but, at the same time, infamous plan for increasing the revenue. Great difficulty has, up to the present time, been experienced in obtaining a spirit licence. Each well-populated



NATIVE OUT SHOOTING.

village has, perhaps, one licensed retailer of spirits, while the smaller villages are dependent for supplies on their larger neighbours. The result of this has been to make getting intoxicated a very arduous undertaking, and the general effect on the villagers and coolies in the neighbourhood has been of a most salutary description. All this highly commendable state of affairs has been knocked on the head by the

desire of Government to enrich the exchequer by a few rupees, paid for additional liquor licences—such a paltry few, indeed, that it is quite incredible that they can make any palpable difference to the purse of a great nation, while the amount of harm done is incalculable. Outside many of the large gardens liquor shops have been set up, an act alike unfair to the planter, who has paid the Government well, in the first instance, for his labourers, and on whose physical condition and powers of work his prosperity depends; and to the coolies, who, unable to resist the temptation put in their way, spend their hardly-earned rupees in reducing themselves to a state of utter incapacity for to-morrow's work. This is only, of course, the planter's view of the newly ordained licensing system, but it is evident to anyone that the effect on the future working of a garden must be terribly demoralising. If the authorities had studied carefully to find out some means of injuring tea planters as a body, they could not have hit upon a more diabolical plot than this. Can nothing be done to impress upon the authorities the awful effects of placing such a temptation in the vicinity of a garden where many hands are employed? Already innumerable stumbling-blocks are surrounding the planter's footsteps, embarrassing him at every turn: these are surely enough to cause the whole fraternity, in a state of disgust, to destroy every trace of their industry, and leave the land to go back to its original jungle, or for Govern-

ment to deal with as best they can. This last mode of recruiting funds for the national exchequer at the expense of the hardly-pressed employer of labour, calls for some sturdy complaint and action before further mischief arises

CHAPTER VIII.

INSECTS OF ASSAM—A SPIDER'S LICK—MOSQUITOS' VILLAINY
—CENTIPEDES AND SCORPIONS—DINNER INTERRUPTIONS
—A QUIET NIGHT—FROGS—BEETLES—ECCENTRIC MICE—
INDIAN ANTS—A WHITE ANT'S CAPABILITIES OF DEVOUR-
ING—LIZARDS FOR WALL DECORATIONS—FLIES—BATS—
GORGEOUS BUTTERFLIES—THE TORTOISE-BEETLE—THE
GREEN PARROT—VARIETIES OF MONKEYS—OUR PET—
THE GREAT CARNIVORA AND GRAMINIVORA.

A LONG blood-curdling chapter might easily, if space allowed, be devoted to insects, flying and crawling; birds, beautiful but songless; wild animals, dangerous and inoffensive; and all the other fauna inhabiting this vast natural history repository of the world. But first a word or two concerning insects, the smaller enemies, and most persistent attendants, that are everywhere present and for ever asserting their powers to make a disagreeable impression. Were it not for the innumerable mosquitos; ants, black and red; spiders, whose every step is a good six-inch stride, and whose bite or lick, as it is generally termed, will incapacitate the unfortunate licked one from active work for a few days after the accident,—I say, if it were not for

these and a few hundred other detestations that have life, a stay in Assam would be rendered twice as agreeable. I may as well here mention, while on the subject of spiders, that the lick produces a curious after-result, somewhat similar to blood-poisoning, and very uncomfortable and painful for the sufferer, the part affected presenting the appearance of mildew under the skin. After all, the intense longing to get back to England is really only the natural outcome of a desire to be quit entirely of a country full of noisome creatures and disgusting smells.

To assist in making up a complement of insects, sufficient in point of numbers to give no other country a chance of competition, there are creeping things innumerable, and boasting names that are not easy to retain in one's memory. But amongst a few old familiar friends, the cockroach holds a place, the only truly harmless beastie, but possessing a great predilection for boots, straps, portmanteaus, and other leathern goods; beetles, various in size and formation; lizards, centipedes, &c.

The *première* place, by right, is the mosquito's. I place him first because by pure industry he has earned and deserved this doubtful compliment. No work published up to the present year of grace, treating in any way of travels to the warmer latitudes, that does not make some reference to the mosquito, usually in terms anything but polite, to that small particle of villainy. Notwithstanding his popularity amongst writers of travels as a subject for unvarying

anathematization, yet, after reading these descriptions, I have invariably come to but one conclusion—viz., justice has not been done to the subject, considering the enormities committed during a protracted career of enmity with all mankind. My pen falters when I conjure up past personal experiences of the alternate subtleness and audacity of this little brute; how, even now, the common English gnat, winging his aimless flight, buzzes by my ear and makes my blood turn cold, carrying my thoughts back again to the East with its mosquitos. The persistently blood-thirsty attacks, the adroit twist with which he just evades the quickly-descending hand of kismet (translated as the “bitten one”), the artful way in which he will lie closely concealed for many hours awaiting an opportunity, in a fold on the inside of the mosquito curtain, until such time as the would-be slumberer has made himself comfortable, then, directly the light is out with what fiendish malignity drones and hums his preliminary pæan for the all too certain victory—are episodes never to be talked of lightly or forgotten. After a sleepless night, at the first peep of daylight, with what feelings of insatiable revenge does the luckless traveller rise in wrath to search for his enemy!—always to find him filled out and contented but wakeful, resting after his labours high up the mosquito curtain, where, though surfeited with blood and heavy of flight, he is difficult to capture. Away he goes at the first suggestion of danger to his vile body, and before he is finally smashed, has reduced

his Nemesis to a state of profuse perspiration. New comers, with the fresh blood of England flowing in their veins, are troubled more with the mosquito's attentions than the older sojourners in the land: their skin is thinner, consequently the irritation set up by the poisonous little stings results in leaving a sore that continues painful for a week or ten days, and renders the putting on of a boot, when the foot has been the part attacked, anything but a pleasant task.

Centipedes and scorpions are more deadly in their bites; but with the latter, fortunately, Assam is not plentifully supplied. Centipedes run to a large size; an average one would probably measure four inches from tip to tip; occasionally, however, they will be met with five or six inches long. A more loathsome creature it is impossible to picture, as it appears wriggling and darting across the floor, always travelling at such a pace that its forty or fifty legs are invisible. Armed with a large pair of nippers on its tail end, which it twists up when defending itself, somewhat after the manner of an earwig, it presents a formidable front to the hapless person who should approach it unwittingly, or upon whose head it falls from the bungalow roof. An unpleasant feeling steals over a dinner party when the pat, made by the fall of a centipede, is heard in the room—looks are exchanged, and all feet are lifted off the ground until some quick eye discerns the cause of the interruption, making off, as fast as he can put leg to ground, in the direction of

the book-case, or some other handy cover. To seize a thin cane, and, with well-directed aim, cut him smartly across the middle, is the work of an instant; the heel of a boot settles the rest.

At night various noises outside and inside keep the heaviest sleeper awake, until he grows accustomed to them. Every night, and all night, there is the same chorus of croaking frogs going on—not the ordinary croak of an English frog, but a veritable mammoth, whose note is penetrating and unutterably woe-inspiring. Amidst the monotony of the chorus will rise the deep guttural utterances of two old toads, love-making, calling to each other over the puddle created by the emptying of your last tub. The noises are suddenly and rudely broken in upon by the boom of a beetle, as he rushes into the bedroom. Round and round he whirls with a terrific uproar, like to a hundred spindles hard at work, until he winds up with a grand crash, as he comes blindly in contact with one of the rafters, or the looking-glass. A short silence ensues, during which you sincerely hope that he has knocked his detestable brains out; but no, he is only stunned. Hark! there he is, prone on his back whirring round his wings, unable to get up, spinning round and round with ever-increasing noise in his frantic efforts to get the right side uppermost. Sleep under these circumstances being impossible, up the wretched wooer of that shadowy god Morpheus has to rise, and remove the new cause of his disquieting; only, perchance, to find, when safe back in bed again,

having first carefully tucked in the mosquito curtains that there is a large bat in the room, which proceeds to make frantic efforts to regain the liberty that he has unknowingly deprived himself of. So the night wears through, full of incidents, exactly as is the day—events made up out of the inconvenient activity of birds, beasts, and insects.

Mice and rats are here also in goodly numbers, and contribute their quota towards the enjoyment of a quiet night. If nothing else is on the move, the weary planter can invariably calculate on representatives of one or both of these exasperating families careering recklessly round the room, over the boxes, on to the dressing-table, where they succeed in knocking over in their gallop some small article that makes a noise like thunder as it tumbles on to the hollow floor of the chung. Even in broad daylight mice will come out and play about the room. There is hardly a residence in India in which you will not find these small plagues running about in the middle of the most frequented apartment, having no fear of its occupants, helping themselves to the crumbs that have fallen round the table, or, more to their taste, deeply interested in the almonds and raisins on the side-board, the ascent to which elevated position is impossible to any ordinary animal twice its size, but to the mouse a promenade of the most simple description.

Indian ants are universally known, and, next to the mosquito, the most dreaded of the insect world, for

under no circumstances can his too familiar presence be dispensed with : he is ubiquitous. Death in any form has a gigantic attraction for him ; his scent is keen, and death to him means something to eat. If it be but a mosquito that has paid a well-deserved debt to nature, the last convulsive kick has scarce left his body ere a solemn line of ants parade in the direction of the defunct one, gather round the carcase, pounce upon and carry him off to their nest, there to be placed in the common stock-pot. Endless amusement can be got out of watching the mode of procedure of these wonderfully organised little fellows. For instance, when an opportunity arises for them to really put forth their strength collectively—as over the Brobdingnagian body of a dead beetle—the system with which they work together is curiously effective. After the first jubilation over the discovery of the corpse, and the consequent discordant efforts of each ant to pull his own way (with a view to showing what a strong fellow he is, or possibly to securing the prize for his own especial delectation), they will settle down to haul their comparatively monstrous load in a very business-like fashion, while one ant, a sort of overseer, bustles in and out and round the burden, evidently dictating the way that it should go, giving a push here and a pull there, to stimulate his fellow-workmen. A certain portion of their labour—for they are always hard at work on something—seems to the uninitiated to be a complete waste of time. One can grasp their reasons for tunnelling underground, but what earthly

use can there be in covered ways above ground, in building which they spend a vast amount of time and show much ingenuity? If, too, they would only confine their tunnel-building proclivities to the outside of the bungalow, all would go well; but, unluckily, they appear to get much satisfaction out of placing them in the bindings of books, or between the outsides of two calf-bound volumes, or wherever the book-boards and printed matter do not lie flush with each other. When among a row of books there is sufficient space for him to crawl through, there the ant will build his home; or, correctly speaking, a portion of it. This is a true record, although many villainies of the black and red ant have not been mentioned for want of time. Next there is the white ant.

Perhaps a worse instance of pure love for heartless destruction, prompted, apparently, by an insane love of mischief, does not exist. To the white ant all things are edible, except kerosene oil and metal goods. Nature has constituted him with a ten thousand ostrich power digestion, which he is for ever abusing. In appearance he is of a creamy white colour, and of a retiring disposition. Suggestive of inoffensiveness, it is not until he has buried himself in some dark corner that his natural depravity comes out. The spot selected is usually one that is likely to be undisturbed by man for some time, such as a portmanteau put away, or a box full of clothes that are not in immediate use. If there is one thing that he appreciates more highly than another it is a good

English box made of deal. Leave him alone for a month with an article of this sort, and he will reduce it to such a condition that, when an attempt is made to lift it, it will not bear its own weight, but crumbles to powder at the first touch. Hat-boxes, gun-cases, stocks of guns, portmanteaus, packing-cases, furniture, the floor of the bungalow, and a thousand other things, all these mean good living to white ants. They have a strong distaste for kerosene oil and boiling water: the first-named, smeared over the furniture, will, if frequently applied, keep them away; the latter judiciously introduced where they are collected together to pursue their usual calling, will have a somewhat disturbing influence.

Lizards are plentiful but harmless, and form a pretty wall decoration. Their food consists of all small flying things; therefore they receive every encouragement to take up a residence inside the bungalow, on whose walls they cling in an extraordinary manner. At night, when insects, attracted by the lights, fly in, lizards hold high carnival. The neighbourhood of a lamp, as a point of vantage, is much sought after; and here can be noted the craft employed by the lizard to secure his dinner. Twiddling his tail jerkily, as a cat does in the process of fascinating a bird, he stealthily advances step by step, with body crouched and eyes distended, until within striking distance, when with a sudden dash he seizes his prey, gobbles it up, and is immediately ready to repeat the performance. Hornets, wasps, bees, are

well cared for by Dame Nature, and thrive prodigiously if their size, which is at least twice that of their English *confrères*, be accounted as a satisfactory sign of goodly condition.

At times, dinner is disturbed by the irruption of thousands of crickets, small beetles, or green flies, whichever are in season, that tumble headlong into the soup, glasses, lamps—in fact, into every spot that one could wish free of them. The pleasures of the table, under these circumstances, cease to hold out any attractions. Again, at quite unexpected moments, a large insect, a species of locust, settles with a flop on your face, alarming enough in a place like Assam, but it is only the harmless praying insect, so called on account of a strange way that he has of doubling up his two front claws, when he presents a most ludicrous appearance of supplication. A peculiarly objectionable visitor is a tiny beetle, properly enough called the stinking bug. At certain times of the year these horrible little brutes muster in great force, depositing their odious bodies in the most frequently traversed quarters of the bungalow, in order, as it seems, that they may be trodden upon, and, *en revanche*, throw off a perfume so intensely disagreeable that hand-punkahs, handkerchiefs, scent, etc., are brought into requisition for the next quarter of an hour to dispel the stifling odour. Once I inadvertently squashed one in my eye, a sensation as if the pupil had been suddenly seared with a red hot iron seized me, and for the next half an hour the

intense agony prevented the possibility of opening either one eye or the other. I never expected to look out of that eye again.

Bats, flying foxes, owls with a terrible hoot, and around whom ominous suspicions are cast of possessing the power to scent out those about to die—these and countless other creatures render night a particularly lively time, and add a novel and charming zest to life in the East.

Butterflies and beautifully-coloured birds abound in every variety of shape and size. The commonest, but one of the most magnificently-marked, is the jay, to whom nature with niggardly hand has given a splendid coat, but a note that vies with the shriek of a slate pencil when guided by the hand of mischievous youth, and sends a cold shudder down the back of the hearer. Resplendent with his golden yellow plumage, the mango bird forms an attractive mark against the sky, and as he flits across the tea garden, the greens of the surrounding jungle look colder than ever. Butterflies, equal in size to an English tit, marked with bars and blots of colour in extraordinary contrast, float round the bungalow, deeply interested in the growth of the hybiscus or the roses.

Of the Coleoptera, undoubtedly the most beautiful is the tortoiseshell beetle ; but he is not common, and is peculiar, I believe, to only certain parts of Assam. In his flight he presents the appearance of a small golden ball of fire, surrounded by thin gossamer ; at

rest, on close inspection, the under part of his body closely resembles solid gold-scaled armour, while the wings are of a thin horny material, not unlike tale to the touch, and when closed, shaped like the shell of a tortoise, and bearing in the centre a distinctly coloured impression of that reptile.

Hornbills (or the beefsteak bird, a name that they acquired from a peculiar method the natives have of preparing the flesh so as to resemble that delicacy) and green pigeons are to be found in great abundance, and afford an acceptable change to the terribly monotonous dietary routine. The former, with gigantic yellow bill, presents an ill-proportioned, top-heavy appearance, but like the green pigeon is exceedingly shy, being doubtless aware that Europeans do not walk about armed with guns for no purpose. The green pigeon is a remarkably attractive bird, with a coat of many colours, and feathers close and compact, that render him, like his English representative, a difficult bird to kill. They are migratory. Their residence in Assam extends over a space of about three months, and we were always sorry when their time of sojourn amongst us had expired. Snipe, in the cold weather, come in vast numbers, but the climate seems to affect their flight, for they lazily flap along in a down-hearted kind of way, at not more than half the pace of the English bird, nor do they approach that distinguished ornament to the table in delicacy of flavour.

The jungle fowl remains a perpetual resident, and

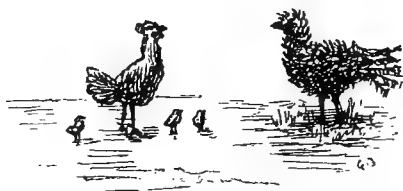
is delicious eating. In sport he would take rank with the partridge, for he is full of pluck, and will fly until, exhausted by his wounds, he drops dead. The cock bird has glorious plumage, and is about the same size as a game bantam, and, like him, is perpetually on the watch for a row. The female is a dusky brown, and nearly as large as her lord and master. Our only pheasant was griffs, uneatable; but up in the hills they have a bird known as the hill pheasant, who is hard to hit, and very palatable.

I must not forget the green parrot, the noisiest occupant of the garden, and a scoundrel of the deepest dye. Dainty in feeding, they have a great predilection for the choicest of the fruit: mangoes, peaches, guavas, plums, etc., pay toll to these marauders, who, not content with eating their fill of the best and ripest, nip off the rest, and leave them on the ground to rot, or for the benefit of the ants. Whenever there is nothing else to do in the shape of mischief, they will get up a fight with some of their fellows; then the air is tortured with a tornado of piercing screams, succeeded by a sudden dash of the whole colony across the garden, leaving only an impression on the eye of the beholder as of a flash of green lightning having just darted by. Their only amiable quality is that, in the hands of a good *khan-sama*, they make a capital imitation of turtle soup.

Distressing, indeed, is the monotony of the notes of most Eastern birds, especially the better-looking ones. It would appear as though their pleasing powers of

song had been allotted in inverse ratio to their personal appearance. Sweetness can claim no part in their matutinal lays, one long drawn-out note, ending up usually with a screeching, rasping sound, has to do duty for their jubilations; though, doubtless, they mean as well as a canary thrilling with the warble of its most beautiful song.

Among the curiosities of the feathered tribe is a peculiar variety of the chicken, which a perverse dispensation has ordained, in many instances, should go through their brief span of life with feathers



CHICKEN WITH REVERSED FEATHERS.

reversed, presenting an uncanny, woe-begone, disreputable appearance to an eye accustomed to regard feathers as a pattern of neatness and sleekness. The rough and tumble look of these ill-conditioned fowls, especially exaggerated on a rainy day, puts sympathy out of the question, and I often found myself pondering whether one of these phenomenal birds would look as well on a dish, and cut up the same as an ordinary specimen of her race.

Penetrating, in the course of a clearance, into the jungle, the cutters disturb hundreds of monkeys,

which start up and rush chattering away, swinging from the topmost branch of one tree to the next. The hoolock, the largest specimen of monkeydom in Assam, is a sturdy, dark-coated, shaggy, long-armed fellow, very shy, but possessed of a deep, rich, musical note that reverberates again and again through the jungle when he has once found his tongue. The noise made by these animals (they are seldom to be found singly, but usually go about in parties of eight or ten) has been, not inappropriately, compared to a pack of hounds in full cry. Awake at first peep of dawn, they travel through the jungle, uttering their curious cry, at first in chorus, but finally tailing off to one solitary yelper that keeps on calling, and tries to resuscitate the musical din. Though the sound seems to be but a few yards away, if you happen to be standing near the edge of the jungle, yet the hoolocks are never visible, and it is only by driving them into a well-wooded corner with open country beyond that a chance view may be had, and then only for the shortest period. So wary are they, that they seldom fall into captivity; even the natives—themselves pretty 'cute—are baffled by their cunning. Sometimes one will get separated from the rest of the band, and fall among his enemies, who can always make a good market of their prize as a curiosity, the usual value set upon a full-grown hoolock being from thirty to forty rupees.

Another curious specimen—a dear little fellow belonging to the monkey world—is the shame-faced

monkey. Quaint of face, with large round eyes, suggestive of entire confidence and trustfulness, with a gentle way of moving about, his bashfulness is so great that he prefers to hang his head down or hide his face in his hands (it is cruel to call them paws) or behind any convenient cover where he can get away out of sight rather than be rudely stared at. We possessed one in whom, for the short time he took up his residence amongst us, we placed thorough reliance, thinking that this, at any rate, was not the animal to abuse it. He was brought up to the bungalow, having been captured by the coolies after they had finished work for the day. His shyness was his most attractive feature, and in order not to obtrude our presence on him, and to make him feel comfortable we tied him up with a long cord to the lattice-work, on which were many creepers, and left him alone for the night. Behold, in the morning he was gone! cord and all. We would have forgiven his sudden departure if he had left the cord behind him, for cord is cord in such out-of-the-way places; but that he, the embodiment (ostensibly) of all that was gentle and meek, should have gone off, taking this property with him, forcibly brought home to us the fact that we should never put faith in outward appearances, in this case so much in his favour. Besides every quality that made him lovable, his personal exterior was comely and sleek, his fur being similar to, or rather rivalling, the chinchilla in fineness of texture and colour. Alas, how may every form of deception

lurk under the most unsuspecting looking externals!

Pariah dogs and jackals, first cousins, according to natural history, are the necessary accompaniments to all tea gardens. The former fraternize with the coolies in the lines, and have, to a certain extent, sociable instincts, while the latter pass the day in the surrounding jungle or tea bushes, away from the haunts of men. Both lead roving lives of treachery and deceit; for without thieving their existence would cease to be. No one, even the most tender-hearted, thinks of giving a pariah anything, unless it be a kick; or, perchance, his unwelcome and uninvited presence is acknowledged by throwing something handy at him. Always hungry, gaunt, lean, his ribs prominently proclaiming their whereabouts through the skin, an extraordinary cunning, fox-like look in his eye, good length of limb to enable, if an emergency should occasion it, his speedy exit—he goes through life with every man's hand against him, bearing the stamp of a hunted beast, especially marked in the abject manner in which he carries his tail. Nature has been unkind to him in not allowing him any method of showing his satisfaction at a kindly action, a sensation that is likely to be foreign to him for the reason that he has never had a single chance of experiencing what it is like. He cannot bark; a short, sharp yelp is his best effort in this line. There are instances of an occasional development of attachment to some one coolie who has, in a moment of tender-

hearted sympathy, shared his humble fare with the brute; but these are rare. So much for the pariah. His near relation, the jackal, is very similar in character and disposition, with all his vices, and but one saving feature in his depravity, viz., he keeps out of sight as much as possible, although he frequently makes himself heard. A pack of jackals, sweeping through the garden and past the bungalow, in the dead of night, uttering their chorus of howls, produces an uncomfortably weird sensation, and makes one involuntarily associate their unearthly cry with the terrible wail of disappointment that imagination pictures would be uttered by disembodied spirits let loose from Hades to seek for rest on that earth that they have quitted, but, disappointed in their search, continue, with lamentations and despair, their unsuccessful journeyings. I know no more soul-terrifying noise when heard for the first time; and I remember that my first impression, after a shudder had passed over me, was that two or three banshees had escaped, and preceded me to India. Jackals are very good scavengers, but when nothing is left to scavenge (this word, I am afraid, is now hardly admissible, but no doubt will one day be accepted, and I am only anticipating its use by a few years) they will levy on the moorgie-khana (chicken-house). Missing chickens total up to a considerable amount at the end of each month, whenever the khansama is fond of good living, and many a bird that was intended for his master's table finds its way diverted, through the form of

savoury curry, into the maw of that excellent man. Under these circumstances the jackal figures in the rôle of that much-abused and wrongly-represented animal—the domestic cat, to whom most missing delicacies can be indirectly traced, if we accept Albert Smith's authority.

Vultures and kites render powerful assistance to the pariahs and jackals in demolishing things objectionable. During a murrain among the cattle, which carried off a great number of the poor brutes, these animals held high carnival. We could always mark the spot where a cow had died, by the surrounding trees being thickly dotted with vultures in various stages of repletion. They are of a melancholy humour, and will always select a tree that is blighted or that has been struck by lightning, and on its bare branches sit clustered together in rows of ten or twelve, packed side by side. Some, after their meal, presumably to aid digestion, enjoy a siesta, with head on one side, and wings loosely drooped, so as to distribute the genial rays of the sun over their foul bodies. While these snooze, the hungry late arrivals are disputing with the jackals over the carcase, and nothing is heard but snarls and flappings of wings, for each one is intent on securing a more prominent position at the delectable feast, and jostles his neighbour. A planter, in the course of his rounds through the garden, coming suddenly upon a party thus engaged, is much struck by the curious *mélée* that they present. Nothing of the carcase can be seen for

the crowd of animals quarrelling over it ; and beyond turning their heads to look at the cause of the interruption, their equanimity remains undisturbed. A few of the birds, standing apart after their meal is finished, and happening to be nearest the intruder, will walk off in the opposite direction, stretching their pinions in the vain hope of being able to fly, but they have miscalculated the additional weight of their dinner, and the sluggishness following after a too ample repast. Their efforts to leave mother earth are in vain : let them flap their huge wings ever so strenuously, they cannot rise an inch. We will leave them there undisturbed, to enjoy their filthy repast ; for, after all, they are performing for us a useful office, by getting rid of a probable source of many fevers.

Boar hunting is a form of sport that has gained a firm hold in many portions of India, but here, in Assam, the denseness of the jungle completely frustrates any attempt to follow the chase. No power on earth could prevent the animal from retreating to cover five minutes after he had broken away. A wild pig may be viewed trotting through the tea, but he keeps well under shelter, and it is only by the merest chance that he prevents a favourable opportunity for a shot. When he is killed, nobody but a few low caste coolies, who devour anything, will touch him. The dead pig not unfrequently works a retribution on his admirers during the course of the ensuing three or four days, and indigestion is a form of malady that is not entirely unknown.

Certain portions of the country are infested with bears, whose mission in life would appear to be, judging by my own experience, imperilling the necks of the European population by digging large holes in the roadway. Driving along in the evening, keeping a sharp look-out for pitfalls or sloughs where the wheels of the buggy are likely to stick, geographically marking all these perilous localities on the tablets of one's memory, with a view to studiously avoiding them on the return journey,—all calculations are brought to naught, when retracing our steps, by a sudden wrench and an upset, and that too at a spot on the road which you left a few hours before in as good a state of repair as most Assamese highways ever aspire to. To jump up, and if there is no apparent damage done, find that your old enemy the bear has been hard at work scooping out a goodly-sized grave, in the most prominent part of the way, and to avoid which, even in the daylight, would have been almost impossible, is the work of a second. The next most advisable step is to examine the state of your springs, wheels, horses' knees, etc., and on arriving at the first bungalow, warn the occupant of the dangers of travelling along that route. Road-keeping has always been a source of much worry and vexation to the planters; but now that the Government are beginning to show a fairly liberal desire to help to preserve their own roadways, by the payment to the nearest planter in whose district the road lies (of course, conditionally on his consent to undertake the

work) of a fixed sum per annum, according to the length of road and the number of pukha bridges requiring to be renewed or repaired;—I say, now that the expenses of road-keeping will not be entirely cast upon the planter's shoulders, there is hope that all the high-roads will be before long in a drivable condition.

A few words concerning the most useful brute in Assam, the elephant, will not be out of place. If they were to die out, I really can form no idea how the Eastern world would get on without them, or what could take their place. Buffalo and bullocks divide the lighter labours of the plough or cart-drawing between them. A strong buffalo can even be used for dragging the smaller timber from the jungle clearing, but when, through the heaviness of the soil, buffalo are not able to operate, the elephant is requisitioned, and rarely fails to accomplish work that could not possibly be effected by any other motive power. A giant of strength, willing and docile, he goes about his work in a business-like way, dragging gigantic trunks of trees, or carrying heavy loads that would otherwise be a source of very considerable perplexity as to how they were to be moved. The indiscriminate slaughter of these splendid fellows, under the title of sport, has been rightly tabooed, and a heavy penalty attaches to anybody killing one without special permission. The Indian authorities employ in Assam one gentleman's services for catching and training wild elephants for their duties as beasts of burden, and a very paying speculation this

must be for the powers that be. Our last Naga expedition pointed out in a most marked manner how entirely dependent on this mode of conveyance, in a hilly country with terribly bad tracks, the army was for its supplies; and the thoughtless way in which seventy of these poor beasts were underfed and worked to death will be long remembered amongst the planters who owned them. A disgraceful delay in settling up claims for the value of the animals destroyed had ultimately to be brought to a termination by the appointment of a committee (that never-failing refuge for all governmental mismanagement) as valuers.

A long, even swinging step, with which they do not speedily tire, carries them over the ground at an average pace of between four and five miles an hour. Some few rogue elephants, turned out of their herd, are met with. These wander about the country doing an immense amount of mischief; but it is easy enough to procure permission to shoot the dangerous brutes, and a good riddance they are to the district which they honour with their presence, when dead.

Of an affectionate disposition, elephants speedily become much attached to their mahout, and will learn tricks from and allow him to do almost anything with them. If he drops his little pointed stick, used in lieu of a whip for driving, the animal will pick it up with its trunk and hand it back; or when he has dismounted he has a choice of two ways offered for remounting: either by placing his foot in the curled-

up end of the trunk, by which he is gently raised to a height whence he can scramble into his customary seat, or else he can mount up behind, using the hind foot, that the willing giant, at a word of command, raises up, as the first step towards a somewhat awkward ascent. Invariably of an easy-going temperament, taking just chastisement meekly, elephants are always ready to overlook an unintentional insult ; but woe-betide the man that does them an injury, with malice prepense : they will store its recollection away with the most malevolent feelings of vindictiveness, awaiting some future opportunity to arise for paying off old scores ; and so surely as the occasion shall present itself, it is hoping against hope to try to believe that the elephant has forgotten the cause of quarrel ; his memory is retentive, and he is a very Shylock in exacting all his due.

Dogs are, curiously enough, his pet aversion. It seems absurd to imagine that a gigantic animal like this should be terrified at so small a creature, but it is nevertheless a fact. They all cordially detest dogs, and are very unhappy if, in the course of a journey, they are accompanied by one. Throughout the march the huge fellow displays symptoms of nervous anxiety as to the whereabouts of his detestation, swaying his ears in a restless manner, and trying to turn his head, so as to have a look at the position of the enemy. Every word of the mahout is apparently understood ; and with the aid of his small stick, and a good deal of exhortation to do as his driver wishes—

all delivered, by the way, at the top of the said driver's terribly treble voice—hatti tramps along, perfectly cognisant of what is expected of him.

There are many worse modes of travelling than to be seated behind a really entertaining mahout—one who understands his business. Probably, if he is in the inclination, he will beguile the time amusingly enough by talking to the hatti, calling on him to go



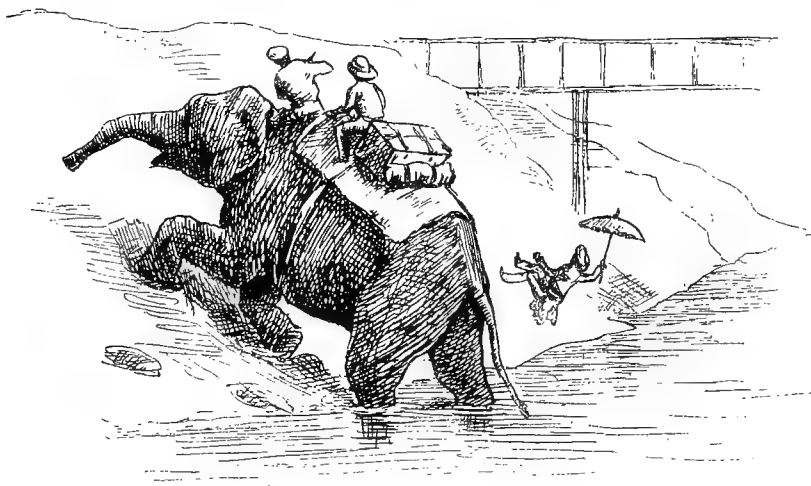
MAHOUT.

faster, telling him that it is no babu (native gentleman) that is on his back, but a white sahib, and that consequently he must be on his best behaviour and put his best foot foremost.

A beginner soon gets accustomed to the swaying motion; although, I remember, on one occasion, taking with me a new servant who had never been out of Calcutta, and to whom the swaying could not have become customary. This worthy, ignorant of elephants and their ways, presented himself before me at the

start, got up in his best, wearing a beautiful new pair of patent leather shoes for the occasion, a luxury that most good Mussulman servants affect, and duly took up his position behind me. We got along very well for the first seven or eight miles, because it was quite flat; then we had to cross a swollen river. The bridge, like most others, was a light wooden structure, not built for elephant traffic, so there was no alternative but to dismount, carry over the trappings, stores, cooking utensils, etc., and leave the mahout to swim the elephant across. On the other side we fixed up again, and journeyed along pleasantly until, in due course, we arrived at another river, a veritable Styx, without the accompanying Charon to facilitate all difficulties of passage. Here the water was sufficiently shallow to allow of our going over on the animal's back, but unfortunately the banks consisted of a loose kind of black mud, shelving down at an angle of sixty degrees. Going down to the river it was as much as I could do to hold on tight enough to prevent shooting over the elephant's head; but as we turned in the river up towards the opposite bank, my poor servant suddenly let go. I heard a scrambling, scraping noise behind; then a "plomp" as he made a hole in the water. Arrived at the top of the bank, without further misadventure, I turned round, and was just in time to see an open umbrella floating gaily down stream, and a head, slowly emerging from out the muddy water, that gasped, sputtered, then smiled the most sickly smile that has ever been seen on mortal

countenance. He was nearly glued to the bottom, owing to the stickiness of the mud ; and when he had waded with much difficulty out of the river, presented a most comical appearance, from the knees to the heels being so coated with black slime that he looked more like an elephant, as to his extremities, than a man. Alas, the patent shoes were utterly ruined !



LOSING MY KITMUTGAR.

I left him to tramp on foot the remainder of the distance, since he flatly refused to have anything more to do with elephant travelling, a resolve not to be wondered at with his recently acquired experience, and more rivers to be crossed.

The Government telegraph department are the lucky possessors of an extraordinarily talented speci-

men. He knows more about telegraph poles than any native, carries or rolls with his feet each pole to the hole that is intended for its reception, beats the earth down round it after it has been placed in position, snaps off boughs that interfere with the route of the wires, and does a variety of other useful things in much less time than would occupy a band of hired coolies.

On a hot march they will, early in the proceedings, break off a small branch, or pluck up a bundle of reeds, to use as a chowrie (whisk) for their sides, to keep off flies and other torments, and when passing through water they will suck up a supply which, after a march of two or three miles, they squirt in small quantities over their hot and dusty sides, retaining a portion for future use, or until the next supply can be procured.

The day's work over, they are turned out, hobbled to a heavy log of wood, and allowed to roam through their native jungle. If an early start has to be made, it often happens that some little trouble is experienced next morning in laying hands upon them, for they will have wandered away three or four miles, notwithstanding the hobbles, and it is only by following their well-defined track that the mahout eventually succeeds in capturing them.

A curious incident occurred to an elephant in the possession of a neighbouring garden just before I left. A favourite old animal had been turned loose, and was wandering through the tea close to the edge

of the jungle, when suddenly, with a heavy rush through the dense cover, a rhinoceros charged out, making a furious attack on the elephant, and succeeded in dashing his horn between her ribs. A more unprovoked assault was never committed. The poor old animal had been lying down on her side for three days, with some ribs broken, when I left; nor have I heard whether she ever got over it.

Rhinos are fairly plentiful in some out-of-the-way districts, and in their erratic course through a garden (a place that under usual circumstances they steer clear of) play fearful havoc with their unwieldy carcasses amongst the tea.

Tigers there are also in quantities in most districts of Assam. To be suddenly aroused in the middle of the night by squeals issuing from the direction of the stables, followed by a sudden irruption into your bed-chamber of the chowkeydar and his black satellites, green with fear, and yelling in chorus, "Barg, barg" (tiger), is not the most pleasant awakening. There is not a moment to be lost if the horses are to be saved. A light is secured, rifles, together with all the odd firearms that can be speedily collected together, are distributed, and the procession starts for the stables in the following order. First the sahib, behind him the light-bearer, succeeded a few yards off by the chowkeydar with a gun; then, some considerable distance in the rear, the establishment, armed with anything handy, slowly come after. Each and all—always, of

course, excepting the sahib—are prepared to bolt on the slightest appearance of danger.

The sight or scent of a tiger nearly reduces a horse to fits. Even the spot where one of these brutes has crossed the road will have terrors for the pony that you are mounted on, and neither spurring nor whipping will get him past the place. At the first signs of dusk, leopards and tigers sally forth, seeking what they may devour, to remain abroad until dawn shall drive them back to their lairs in the jungle. In the middle of the night, and a few yards from the bungalow, the noise made by a leopard strikes disagreeably on the ear, a sound like the grating of a blunt saw against hard wood. Luckily, thank goodness, these visitations are not frequent, for in the neighbourhood of civilization there is but a poor chance of a supper; and it is only when made bold by hunger and driven to extremities that they will risk an attack on the stables. Any unfortunate horse then which happens to be tethered up tightly has but a poor chance for his life. So much for the animals of Assam.

Now a small space for the fruits; of which, perhaps, the less said the better, for fear of misleading or raising false hopes among my readers.

Pine apples, custard apples, tengas (a kind of lemon or lime), mangos, lychees, plantains, guavas, peaches, and jack fruit, are the most abundant and easily raised of the fruits. The first-named grow plentifully, as also do plantains and guavas. They seem, however, to be entirely deficient of flavour. Pine-

apples combine the ornamental and useful, and make a formidable edging to the garden plot with their bristling spiky leaves. The far-famed mango, at any rate in Assam, is a vast humbug, nine out of ten being afflicted with what is vaguely termed "pokes," or maggots. Plantains are the only fruit that can have any reliance placed in them; and though at first sickly of taste to the uncultivated European, their natural good qualities cause them speedily to be well appreciated. Of the fruit I can only say that I never thought it worth the trouble of disputing with the parrots and other birds, for they seemed to have a liking for it, while I had none.

CHAPTER IX.

LAWS OF HEALTH—RECKLESSNESS IN LIVING—SUNSTROKE—
NECESSARY MEDICINES—FORMS OF DIFFERENT ILLS—
PRICKLY HEAT—PRECAUTIONS WHEN CAMPING OUT—
JUNGLE FEVER—ENLARGED SPLEEN—COLD WEATHER
FEVER—WATER SUPPLY IN FACTORIES—THE COOLIE
HOSPITAL—SNAKE BITES.

WE must not pass on without a few remarks on the laws of health necessary to be observed for the well-being of both European and native. To keep in a condition of good health, under the terrible strain of climatic influences, is a most essential consideration for the successful carrying through of work to be done ; at the same time, while in Assam, difficult of accomplishment. Men in their lonely lives out there are dependent on themselves and their good health for continuing in their billets : a planter that is weak and sickly is incapable of doing his employers justice, and is best out of the country. There are such innumerable little inconveniences, a lack of comforts, deficiencies in quality of food, sudden variations of temperature, etc., that the temper and health have both a severe strain put upon them. Any little illness is greatly aggravated by the sufferer being

confined to the bungalow, where exercise is out of the question ; for in this country activity means health, and directly a small ache or pain steps in, all exposure to the sun must be avoided. Among the smaller ills, men in this vile country suffer terribly from tooth-ache. Teeth decay at an alarming pace, whether from the complete change of diet to which Europeans have always been accustomed, or what not, it is hard to tell.

Liability to any of the before-mentioned discomforts and the hard work together induce a spirit of recklessness in living which results in eating things that are totally unsuited to the climate, or in indulging in too many "pegs," and false methods of stimulating the appetite. A jaded appetite longs for something palatable, so under the disguise of various condiments, chutnees, etc., many otherwise tasteless morsels are taken into the system. Exposure to the sun—an everyday and all-day evil that cannot be avoided in a planter's business—is the foundation on which nearly all diseases are based. With the ordinary protection afforded by a good thick solar topee, the bad effects of a midday's sun can be warded off, to a limited extent ; but it is after a long period of fasting, or immediately after a heavy meal, at which something more powerful than water has been taken, that a proneness to sunstroke develops. This is indeed a terrible visitant, irresistible in its force, and impossible to dispose of by any known remedy. Black men and white are alike susceptible to it. In a bad attack it

strikes a man down so quickly that there is barely sufficient time to take him up and carry him to his bungalow before he is dead ; but there are several degrees in the power of the stroke, and every one is not necessarily fatal. Loss of memory, either temporarily or lastingly, periodical attacks of mental aberration, divers forms of eccentricity, etc., are a few of the results arising out of a touch of the sun. After one attack a man's life is uncertain ; he is extremely susceptible to another stroke, and it is best for him to return to England at once.

Headache and prostration follow more than usually violent exertion, or a long period of outdoor exposure. To dispel this, as many men do, with stimulants is an easy remedy ; but a more satisfactory and less harmful way of dealing with the nuisance is thorough rest for two or three hours, if it can be had.

Quinine, the recognised medicine for all the ills to which flesh is heir, in Assam, is especially serviceable in cases of fever. Exposure to the sun after a dose must be avoided, for then the system is particularly liable to be weakly and incapable of resistance. The exhaustive nature of the climate and work demand of a European, at the outset of his planting career, a very healthy constitution, one that is not likely to get out of order easily ; for once general seediness sets in, the difficulties of shaking it off are insuperable.

With quinine, chlorodyne, and a bottle of brandy, a man can do a great deal towards holding in check the various illnesses that are constantly besetting

him. An active and happily contented mind will do much to assist the medicine when they are required.

Our English ideas of the proper way of cooking are entirely upset. Everything is done up with a buttery compound, known in the country as *ghe*, a very rich distasteful mode that is responsible for a good deal of biliousness and liver attacks.

Such petty everyday inconveniences as mosquito stings are a nuisance, especially if they entail confinement to the bungalow. A person with an irritable skin will at first suffer tremendously from these small torments; the burning sensation after the sting is maddening, but scratching only makes matters worse: the tender skin is rubbed off, and leaves a poisoned sore that is slow to heal.

Anything that upsets the system takes a most bitter form of revenge on the wretched sufferer by depriving him of well-deserved rest at night. Hard as it is under ordinary circumstances to court the rosy god, an impending bilious attack will make it an absurd impossibility to think or hope of getting to sleep. Rolling from side to side in a feverish condition, with perspiration starting out all over the body, and every sound, either inside or outside, intensified to an alarming degree by nervous prostration, how one longs for a gasp of cold air! What priceless treasure would he not give in exchange for half an hour with the thermometer at fifty degrees?

The liver appears to be the most easily disarranged

portion of the internal organisation when in the East, and every slight thing that disagrees with the system threatens to develop into a liver attack. Spirituous liquors, beer, unwholesome food, hot curries, rich sweets, etc., are especially bad when there is any weakness in this direction. Feelings of intense depression and lassitude, with a general indifference to everything, are the commencement and outcome of the complaint. Careful dieting is the only remedy.

A capital form of protection against attacks of cold on the liver—a frequently fatal complaint—is to adopt the native fashion of tying round the waist two or three coils of a fine silk scarf, to be worn both day and night. I have mentioned this protection in a previous chapter, but I think that its usefulness justifies my again alluding to it in this chapter. These wrappers, called *kummerbunds*, can be bought in all colours, of varied thicknesses and sizes, at the nearest bazaar for a small amount ; they wear well, and are decidedly picturesque. Just before dawn of day, the air grows much colder, and it is at this period that the *kummerbund* is of most service in warding off a sudden chill to the liver.

Scarcely a single European gets through his first year without prickly heat, a violent tingling sensation, as of innumerable fine needle points being thrust into the skin, the irritation of which is at times most exasperating. A visitation from this abomination can be looked for at any sudden change of temperature, or just before breaking into perspiration.

The skin all over the body resembles, in point of colour, a boiled lobster's brilliant hues ; the appearance of each tiny pustule, that cover the sufferer in countless thousands, suggests a tremendous attack of measles, and is rather terrifying to those unlearned in its ways.

Most difficult to contend against is the bad but natural habit of sleeping after tiffin. Weary with a hard morning's work, the chief meal of the day just finished, the sun outside using its best efforts to burst the thermometer, and nearly succeeding, the air quite still, the coolies not at work, and our usually noisy friend the crow just managing to gasp in the stifling air as he sits in the shade of a tamal tree with beak agape,—is there not some excuse for going to sleep? But it is a lazy, pernicious habit ; nor does it encourage the development of that very necessary condition, a good digestion. Sleeping during the day discounts the probability of the usual nightly allowance, and instead of waking up refreshed there will be more often headache, a sluggish feeling, and bad temper.

A good principle to lay down is—never to be without chlorodyne and quinine, two invaluable medicines : the former for any kind of dysentery or cholera, the latter for fevers. I have seen some remarkable cures effected by the use of Browne's chlorodyne, and cannot speak too highly of it. Our coolies took very kindly to it, but that was probably on account of its being mixed with a little rum the only thing that

induced them, when really ill, to take it ; mixed with water, they would have nothing to do with it. A suspicion arose, owing to the immense number of men that had the particular form of attack requiring the administration of a dose of chlorodyne, that a good many only came for the sake of the rum, so we had at last to exercise a wise discernment in giving only to the deserving. Assamese, all of whom are good Brahmins, would rather die than take our medicines ; but if they should be over-persuaded, they break caste, a position that is only regained after much penance, and the performance of many religious observances. Another medicine with great virtue is the podophyllin pill, useful to administer to those who are subject to derangement of the liver. This can be added to the medicine chest with satisfactory results.

It is while camping out that men grow careless about themselves, take no precautions, and consequently succeed in laying up a store of all kinds of diseases. The worst of these, and most dreaded on account of its pertinacity in sticking to its victim and refusing to be exorcised, is jungle fever. The ordinary malarious fever of the country is bad enough, in its course sparing neither native nor European, but jungle fever is especially severe on the white man. It is this dreadful malady that afflicts so many of the old Indians that are to be met at home ; and " only an attack of the old fever," that you hear them plead as an excuse for failing to keep some engagement, means several hours spent in paroxysms of ague, cold

and hot alternately, accompanied by sickness, and leaving behind a heritage of intense prostration. Care must be taken when camping out not to sleep on the ground or under trees, some of which give off a poisonous vapour. Select as dry a spot as the nature of the place will permit, then have a chung knocked up of bamboos, on which to place the rezai, or mattress. Never forget to travel, in every part of India, with a rubber sheet, a pillow, a rezai (a kind of eider-down quilt), and medicine. The chung should be erected as high as possible, but under no circumstances less than eighteen inches from the earth. Any man who sleeps on the ground and does not contract some form of fever, may consider himself the luckiest of mortals. Slight malaria can be shaken off by change of air; the return sea journey from India is a favourite remedy for thoroughly disposing of any pretensions that the fever may have as an occupant in perpetuity of your body, but with jungle fever the matter is different. Although it may not appear for months at a stretch, yet it is only biding its time, until some change of condition renders its unhappy victim less able to resist its insidious approach; then it enters again into possession and requires a great deal of turning out. The neighbourhood of stagnant water, or the smell arising from the drying-up of decayed vegetation on the banks of a river whose waters have fallen low, are calculated to produce a visit from this much-dreaded scourge. Bathing after sundown, though particularly pleasant, must be avoided,

as a most risky proceeding that is sure to encourage colds and fever.

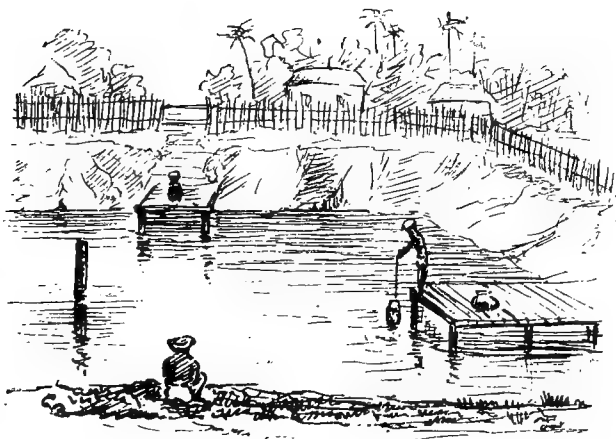
Enlargement of the spleen attacks a large proportion of natives, but rarely settles down on a white man, unless he has been unfortunate enough to have had a succession of bad attacks of fever, after which he has not taken proper care of himself. The appearance of an enlarged spleen is particularly ludicrous, and can be observed on nine natives out of ten. They do not seem to be inconvenienced by the formidable swelling, but walk, work, are as contented, and live as long as their brethren who are not affected by this unsightly disease.

Day and night are, without much variation during the rains, one long round of terrific heat. The few degrees that the thermometer falls at night are scarcely perceptible, and give but small relief. Great difficulty is experienced in getting to sleep on account of the uncomfortable feeling of being in a perpetual state of perspiration. All the hot season is spent in longing for the cold weather, which brings with it a comfortable change, but at the same time another form of fever. Cold weather fever is an awkward illness to deal with, and, like his jungle namesake, is very pertinacious when once in the system ; nor will he leave, in many cases, until the hot weather routs him out.

The lesser ills that take rank after fevers and sun-stroke are numerous disagreeable, but can generally be defied by careful and abstemious living

combined with plenty of hard mental and bodily work.

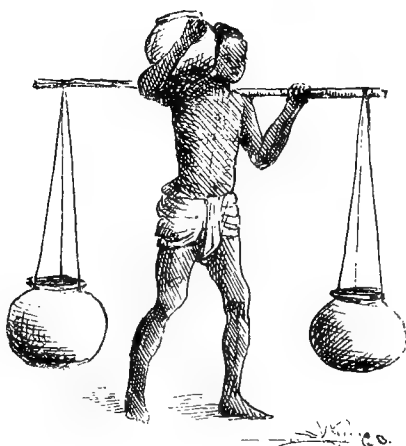
The water supply of factories requires very careful attention, for on the good condition of the drinking water the health of the whole garden, to a large extent, depends. Tanks and wells ought to be thoroughly looked after, and kept clear of any foreign matter that will, in the ordinary course of nature,



A TANK.

present itself. A special coolie is set apart for this important work, and his office is rendered difficult by the natives' unconquerable love of dirt. Tanks (the only source of water supply in the cold weather, throughout which period the rainfall is very slight) are built at an immense expense of money, time, and labour; and where there is only one to supply the

whole garden, this must be of a size sufficiently large to contain enough water to hold out through the dry season, without fear of its being exhausted. If there is anything wrong with the water (and, unless every precaution is taken to secure its purity, nothing is more likely, nor does there exist a better medium for the dissemination of disease), cholera may be ex-



COOLIE WATER CARRIER.

pected to appear amongst the coolies. Then, besides those that actually die from infection, there are numbers of others who are frightened to death, or who, at the first signs of the impending outbreak, turn tail and bolt. But natives are so lazy that, although they know the probable penalty, they will often take the handiest water to drink, instead of going to the trouble of fetching it from the tank; and it is hard to

prevent these unthinking suicides, but it must be somehow accomplished.

No garden can be counted complete that has not set aside a suitable site for a coolie hospital, where, when any infectious disease breaks out, men can be promptly separated from their fellows, and, during ordinary times, as many as are ailing can be treated under one roof. A native compounder is installed at



COOLIE HOSPITAL.

the head of this establishment to deal with the more simple cases of fever, ague, etc., but serious illnesses require the skilled knowledge of the doctor sahib, who makes his rounds once or twice a week. Private gardens enter into an arrangement with the nearest white doctor to pay them periodical visits in the interests of the general health, but the large companies retain

the services of one or two professional men solely to look after their own numerous *employés*.

A more doleful sight than a coolie in hospital can scarcely be found in the East, the abode of horrible sights and smells. Swathed up in a dark coloured blanket, with only the tip of his nose and his eyes peeping out, he looks but a poor representative specimen of that noble creature man. The fever shakes him as he lies on his mattress, but he is un-



SICK COOLIE.

complaining. When addressed he patiently remarks, "I shall die;" but the speedy approach of his dissolution does not seem to bother him much. Poor fellow! he certainly has not much to live for, unless an existence in which hubble-bubble smoking and a hearty dislike for anything in the shape of manual labour, are to be considered the most blissful consummation to that great mystery, life. On an unhealthy garden it is a rare occurrence to find

the hospital empty. Natives have a perverse and unreasonable way of dying : notwithstanding that their illness may be easy enough to treat, yet if the sufferer takes it into his head to die, and says so, die he will, and no power on earth can prevent him. Sometimes, to bring about the desired end, these obstinate fellows will refuse food and medicine. Then force has to be employed to compel them to swallow the things that are good for them ; a waste of labour, however, though it is unnatural to allow a fellow-creature to leave this world without making every effort to save him.

Other coolies there are who look upon the hospital as an institution providentially erected, in which it is possible, by a little manœuvring, to spend many days of the year at their leisure, happily freed from the labours of the hoe. These are shams, who present themselves of a morning with downcast look and trembling frame, a personification of all that is miserable, to appeal to the sympathies of the sahib in order to be released from work for that day. Even the most tender-hearted planters are up to this dodge. If the coolie is really suffering from fever, by simply feeling his pulse his real state can be ascertained without a doubt. The wrath of the sahib when he places his hand on the cool unfevered wrist of an impostor is justifiable, and the judicious application of the cane quickly convinces the coolie that he has made a mistake in imagining that there could be anything the matter with him.

The labours of Hercules pale into insignificance before the efforts of a planter to manage coolies, the mental worry and strain put upon a constitution debilitated by fever or other illness, often culminates in an attack of general seediness and depression, from which it is difficult to rally. A man ought, if possible, to return to England every five or six years for a short visit, in order to recruit his stock of health, to last over another five or six years; and now that the facilities for getting backwards and forwards are daily on the increase, there ought to be more attention paid to the question.

I had almost forgotten to mention the native method of dealing with snake bites. Charming is the only recognised way of effecting a cure. Our own pharmacopœia is particularly silent on all cases of this kind, so an English doctor is not of much assistance under the circumstances. When a native is bitten he does not turn on the reptile and kill it, but allows it to escape; then he returns to his home and sticks a curious compound on the small spot where the needle-like fang has entered the skin, says his prayers, goes through a ceremony with his priest, and awaits the result. Some few take a home-brewed mixture of herbs, but the great virtue lies in this odd sort of sticking plaister. He superstitiously believes that if the small India-rubber-looking patch should tumble off, he would die, but if it holds fast he will live. It is impossible to blame them for this simple act of faith, which seems in most cases to have the

desired result, especially when it is remembered that our own English doctors, with all their research, are incapable of dealing with snake bites. An Englishman, whose range of knowledge for treating such cases does not extend over so many instances, and is, to my mind, in consequence less capable of understanding the nature of them than any ordinary native, would set to work with plaister, blisters, &c., and *cui bono?* to bring about exactly the same result as our superstitious natives.

CHAPTER X.

ASSAM AS IT IS, AND WHAT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN—SHORT-SIGHTED POLICY OF THE GOVERNMENT—EXPENSE OF LABOUR—BAD STATE OF THE TEA MARKET—BROKERS' CHARGES—CAN TEA PAY?—EXPENSIVE BUILDINGS AND LUXURIOUS SURROUNDINGS—AMERICAN COMPETITION—FUTURE OF INDIAN TEAS—FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS—SOCIAL DIFFICULTIES—SUMMARY—AN APPEAL.

YEARS have passed by since the first discovery of tea in Assam, during which the planters have had but little recognition of the great work that they were performing for the State : but it is now high time that the Indian Government took to heart the fact that they should do everything in their power to assist planters in their undertaking, instead of, as at present, hindering by many absurdly vexatious regulations their enterprise, or taking no notice of their repeated efforts to obtain redress for existing grievances. Consider for an instant what Assam would have been without this industry. A sufficiently uninteresting country, sparsely populated, and without a trade or means of locomotion, into which no European would have had any inclination to penetrate, because no inducement could have been held out for such an

objectless journey, except for those foolhardy adventurous spirits, who seem to have no better aim in existence than to risk their lives on exploring expeditions. On the other hand, let us contemplate, with every feeling of satisfaction, the magnificent results, in which the whole of India has shared, by the opening up of a formerly unproductive country.

Planters might, so far as the maintenance of English interests in India, and the intrinsic value of jungle ground are concerned, have had the small plot for a tea garden given to them, in order to encourage populating and making productive a country which else would have been little better than a wilderness ; but governments are proverbially short-sighted to all future interests that may accrue. An enormous capital is sunk here, sufficient in itself to command the respect of any ordinary body of men, but the pioneer-like work with its hardships and dangers that have had to be surmounted, resulting in turning an almost useless tract of land into one of the largest tea-producing quarters of the East, cannot be expected to have any weight with officials who are dazzled by nothing but the magnificence of their own importance.

Year by year, notwithstanding all difficulties in the way, the capital invested has been steadily increasing ; new gardens are laid out requiring more labour and machinery, new roads have to be laid down, steam-boats are building for the enlarged traffic in the

river services, railways even are talked of, and everything points to a still larger addition to the stake that is already enormous: and all this has been built up by private individuals, who have had sufficient pluck go out and battle against a terrible climate, and every form of captious opposition, thwarted rather than assisted by the State.

The labour question is the one of most interest to the planting fraternity, and the one which can only be answered by the authorities. Much anxiety has been expressed for the more speedy and cheaper transit of coolies from Calcutta, for while labour continues at its present exorbitant rate, the poorer gardens will have to work undermanned. Calculating that a garden employing three hundred labourers is not considered a very extensive concern (there are several private gardens with four hundred), and that when about to make a start, everyone of these men will have, if secured through the Government agent, to be brought up at an average expenditure of between ninety and a hundred rupees per head, close on £3,000 is sunk with absolutely no benefit to the planters before a sod has been turned on his property. This is a large slice out of a limited capital so early in the proceedings, especially as the additional expenses for seed, tools, buildings, &c., are heavy, as they must be at the commencement of opening out. If the authorities really feel that concern for the welfare of the native which they profess, surely here is a splendid opportunity put in their way for manifesting it. Let

them forego part of their own profits on his migratory expenses, and provide him with, or put in his way, the means of earning his own livelihood, thus doing their best to stamp out the periodical starvation of millions of the poor wretches, whenever a rice famine possesses the land. The sums of money that have been bountifully supplied by the English, on the occasion of the last two or three famines, if applied to emigration expenses would have gone far to thinning out the population at its most congested points, and rendered future famines on such a scale impossible.

This is the position of affairs : a country crying out for labour, while all around its borders the earth teems with millions of unemployed men. Surely this could be rectified at a trifling outlay, and with immense advantage to both planters, natives, and the authorities. If the latter were to show an inclination of approaching the planter in such a way that their mutual advantages could be discussed on a give-and-take footing, the first blow would be struck at all existing difficulties ; but whenever the planter and official are brought into contact, there is too much of the *noli me tangere* style displayed on one side to make the proceedings agreeable.

During the past two or three years, a period of great depression both in the home and foreign markets, tea, like everything else, has felt the pressure of bad times, and the question that the planter has had to face has been, whether it was possible to cover work-

ing expenses. All hope of making the smallest profit during this time must be counted a wild attempt to tinge an unfortunate state of affairs with a too hopeful view of the future, and calculated to seriously mislead an owner, when he came to balance his accounts. Now, as I write, the tons of Indian teas, which were last year lying in bond, awaiting a purchaser, have been disposed of, and prices are recovering. The glutted market had (and will continue to exercise until a steady demand springs up again) a bad effect upon the industry, in which, of course, the producer is the chief sufferer. Until a thorough revival in trade comes, and the old supply of tea is swept away, there can be no reliable market for Indian teas : everything must be speculation. I do not suppose that we shall ever again see the prices quoted that used to be obtained, unless the liking for strong pungent teas increases rapidly, and they are taken unmixed with the China produce. In this event, competition between the two countries would be at an end, for no one who has once tasted good Indian tea could go back to the thin vapid China stuff. It will take some time before people will understand that the difference in price between the two countries' teas is not nearly so marked as the relative value given for the money. One pound of Indian tea, granted that the flavour is acceptable to the purchaser, at three shillings, is a much more economical outlay than one pound and a half of China at two shillings. Let those that do not believe this statement make the

experiment and see the result. There is no use disguising the disagreeable fact, that the old China plant in Assam cumbers the ground ; its day has gone by, and it must give way before the indigenous and hybrid. To save cultivation and expense, it would be better if many acres of the old tea were allowed to go to jungle.

A year or so ago there was in the *Englishman*, the leading Calcutta newspaper, a long correspondence concerning brokers' charges, and statements were then made, which if substantiated, go to show that the broker gets more than his fair share of the good things in the transaction. There are, of course, brokers and brokers. The time is not far off when the brokers' position will have to be reconsidered, for the high charges made by them, and the low prices that the tea realises, do not reconcile the planter to his part of doing all the hard work and getting a scanty share of the pickings. It is the same middle man that has provoked such a storm in England, where people have, by the co-operative system, defended themselves against paying two or more profits on every purchase. I should be glad to see something of the sort started to assist the Assam planters out of their ever-increasing difficulties.

Mincing Lane, the thermometer by which the state of the tea market is gauged, has been in a state of commotion for some period ; failure has succeeded failure without creating much surprise ; nor could it be expected that the extensive speculations for the

rise and fall of prices should be entered upon without there being burnt fingers somewhere.

Can tea pay under present circumstances?—a query that is very difficult to answer; in fact, there can only be a qualified answer, yes: but much depends upon the planter. That tea has paid handsomely is a fact that has been demonstrated quite recently, men of even five or six years' experience can remember the last of the good times, that glorious, but, alas! short-lived period, when every hundred of acres of tea meant a fair-sized fortune, and when competition being less severe, the market, instead of being overstocked, was in a healthy state of supply and demand. The records of dividends returned by two or three of the large companies whose headquarters are in London, have only to be referred to in order that a good insight may be obtained into the paying capabilities of tea a few years ago.

Up to the present time planters have wasted very little money on luxurious dwelling-places, pukka tea-houses, and the rest. But just before I left the country there were men coming out with grand ideas of having buildings and their surroundings lavishly got up. If this sort of thing spreads, planters, unless enjoying private fortunes which they can afford to spend on the gratification of their taste, will find themselves in the same dilemma as the present English farmer—a man who expects three or four hundred acres to keep him in idleness, and with all the choicest products of the land at his command. I cannot

understand why men, knowing that they will be only temporarily located in the country (I came across but one man who expressed a determination to finish his days in Assam), can go to the expense of building splendid bungalows, etc. They must be aware that there will be a large loss on their retirement, for men are not always forthcoming to buy another man's follies at the same price that he lavished upon them. So long as expenses are kept down, and the garden is worked economically, tea will pay well ; but it is expecting too much that it should be able to afford palatial houses, unnecessary machinery, and English provisions sent up from Calcutta. The old planter was content to live on what the country produced, and thought himself a great man if he possessed one pukka building. His self-denial was the foundation of his success, and he accumulated wealth rapidly. Now, I fear, extensive innovations will be adopted to the detriment of the industry. Economy, even in the smallest details of working, must be rigidly practised in order to make a garden pay sufficiently well to enable a planter on his return home to say that his time in the East was not passed unprofitably.

Managers and assistants, whose incomes are not large, can scarcely hope to save money for the first three or four years ; and even after this period it is a rare thing to find a man who has been thrifty enough to be able to pay his passage home to England in the event of sickness. There are many men who

have passed ten or twelve of the best years of their lives in this terrible climate not one penny richer at this moment than when they left England. What will become of these when health fails them, as it inevitably must, it is hard to think about.

A craze has set in lately for machinery, a most expensive taste, by the way. Machinery that is needful repays the money that is laid out on it in a very short time ; but there are so many experimental machines, full of faults, sent into the country, most of which have to be re-modelled before they will work. Wherever machinery can be employed the amount of labour is materially reduced ; but for the work that entails keeping a large number of coolies, viz., hoeing and plucking, no attempt has been made to substitute other than the work of men's hands. A hoeing machine is most needed, but is as far off as ever, and would be, I am afraid, impossible to construct, on account of the damage that would be done to the tender roots of the plant.

Again, as if there were not enough difficulties surrounding tea planters, India is threatened with American competition ; not that there will be much to fear from that quarter for years to come. Our go-ahead cousins have found what they consider suitable soil and climate, and their Government is making the experiment with a few acres at first, laid out under the direction of a practical planter. India will watch the result with keen interest, as it is to the American market that our planters' attention has

been directed for the disposal of a large quantity of their future produce. Australia has recently come forward as a large consumer; New Zealand will probably follow suit; and with America taking her share, Indian teas would soon be on a firm footing. Great efforts have been made to extend the appreciation for a tea so differing from the ordinary and generally known China article; but the taste was not understood at first, and there was much inequality in the strength on account of the varying modes of manufacture adopted by each garden. London seems sadly behindhand in taking her full share; and I only know of two or three places where pure Assam tea is retailed, and chests with well-known marks can be seen. What becomes of the large quantity imported the fates alone know. There may be other places in the metropolis, but I have never come across them. Any rubbish is collected for the London market from native gardens, or the rough leaf of other gardens—the cheaper the better—and sold as pure Indian tea; but it is unfair to confound this refuse with the ordinary production. The better class of China teas are doctored up with Indian tea to increase their strength, and sold at a higher price—a paying business for the tradesman.

The future of Assam tea is fully assured, and I hope very shortly to see it sold unadulterated at a price that will place it within reach of everyone; but that, under existing circumstances, the planter should be the worst paid of all those that have any-

thing to do with placing the article in the market is an unsatisfactory state of affairs.

Banking arrangements had best be entered into with one of the many Calcutta agents or bankers, all of whom are represented by some English house, and through whom difficulties in getting supplies out from England or remitting home are reduced to a minimum. All large agents act as bankers, and are of especial service to any person arriving in the country for the first time in clearing the baggage, securing rooms and servants, and saving much trouble generally.

The banking charges are very fair, but of their agency commission when acting for a garden I cannot speak so satisfactorily. Agencies of good gardens are valuable businesses, as all the tea is shipped through them, the monetary transactions are conducted by them; they purchase machinery, lead, tea chests, and other requisites of the garden, on every one of which transactions a heavy commission is charged, besides such additional profits—and they must be considerable—as can be made out of an advantageous purchase.

There are few business men, in the true acceptation of the term, in Calcutta. Dilatoriness reigns supreme, and their clients once away up country are cared for by the Calcutta agents in a very off-hand manner. A little more competition introduced into this business would be of much service in compelling the two or three large firms, who monopolise all the principal agencies, to reduce their scale of charges.

Business of every kind is conducted on the loosest principles. Everywhere the pernicious system of credit prevails, and ready money is unheard of. On my first visit to a shop, after selecting what I required, a small slip of paper was placed in front of me, and I was requested to sign for my purchases. My representation that I would rather pay cash called forth an expression of surprise, that stole over the assistant's countenance. This was followed by a species of temporary paralysis, the result of a severe shock to the system, from which he slowly recovered, when he hastened to collect his scattered ideas and complete the receipt for payment, deducting a liberal discount from the price that I should have been charged if I had signed. If it is a carriage that is ordered, or an ice at the hotel, jewellery at Hamilton's, or a book at Thacker, Spink & Co.'s, it is always the same—the inevitable chit is signed, and procures anything. I have often since wondered why some prominent *chevalier d'industrie*, on a large scale, has not turned his attentions to this city, for there is nothing to prevent his living free of expense, and leaving the country, rich in everything that is worth the trouble of signing for.*

Rupees, each about the weight of a two-shilling piece, are heavy to carry about the person ; but the crafty natives up country are shy of paper notes. When moving about a long distance from a large town, considerable inconvenience is experienced in

* Several have tried the experiment and do not find it so profitable or safe as the writer imagines.—*Publisher*.

getting the notes cashed for silver, and in the bazaar, of a station the money-changers charge an exorbitant commission for the accommodation. Some men, to save trouble, entrust the purse to their bearer or kitmutgar; but at all times this is a most risky proceeding, and results sometimes in the loss of a good servant and a few hundred rupees simultaneously.

Before concluding, I must not entirely ignore the few pleasures of a life in Assam. Society here is so limited that social gatherings are events that can but seldom be brought about. Of course there is too much work to be got through to leave much time for vain regrets at the paucity of sociable meetings; and after a hard day's work a man feels much more inclined to go to bed than to give a dinner party and lay himself out to entertain his guests. Yet a man must be curiously constituted that can for ever rest contented with his own thoughts: there is a desire present in most men's hearts to see a little of their fellow-creatures. In this thinly-stocked country it is indispensable to rub against others, if only to get out of bad habits that are contracted by being left too much alone, and to find out what is doing in the tea world. I knew one man—he was very much shut off in the jungle—who had such a wholesome dread of getting boorish, that it was his custom to put on a black coat for dinner during the cold season, even though he dined alone.

Ladies in Assam have the best time of it, and,

being so few in number, are immensely sought after, especially for theatrical entertainments and lawn-tennis parties. This game has established itself firmly all over India. Dinners and parties are usually given when the moon is full, to enable people to drive away afterwards along a well-lighted road. There are many more disagreeable moments in life than a pleasant drive, under a splendid moon, after the heat of a crowded bungalow; but there is a reservation even to this pleasant state of things—the driver must be a steady hand who knows his road thoroughly, or the pleasure is turned into a series of rough shocks as the wheels plunge into deep holes that lie hidden in the shadow of a rut.

Clergymen, except at the stations, are few and far between in this benighted country. Doubtless the necessity of working on the Sabbath has convinced those workers in the cause of religion, outside Assam, that it would be a useless task to erect churches for the good of planters. It is an unfortunate fact that tea firing must be conducted on Sunday as well as any other day, and men with conscientious scruples concerning the strict observance of the day of rest have either to work or throw up their billets. Tea plucked on Saturday would not keep over until Monday, and must be fired on Sunday. If there was no plucking on Saturday, two days out of seven would be lost; and no industry can exist under such conditions. We were one hundred and twenty miles from Dibróoghur, and saw the padre, on an average, about

twice a year; and even then the times for Divine service were badly appointed—generally in the afternoon, when it was madness to think of riding over seven miles under a blazing sun. So I am afraid that the attendances were decidedly limited.

Such a small sacrifice to the fetish of civilisation as hair-cutting is performed by a recognised native barber, if there is a European population in the district; but in our case, being far away from a station, and having a strong objection to a native amateur practising his 'prentice hand on me, my wife took to the shears, and developed, after a little practice, into a first-rate hair cutter. It is curious how easily reconciled one becomes to all such minor inconveniences.

No hard-and-fast directions can be laid down for the outfit, such a great deal depends upon the length of purse and inclination of the emigrant. My advice is, do not take too many things, because of the difficulty and expense when moving about. Buy nothing that can be considered unnecessary. Lay in a large stock of thin vests, Oxford shirts, socks, stockings, and sturdy boots; but do not purchase white drill clothes in England—these can be obtained at one-third of the cost in the bazaar at Calcutta. A small supply of cloth clothes and thicker vests for the cold weather will complete the personal outfit; and beyond the things mentioned everything else is a matter of taste.

Furniture, dinner services, plate, etc., can be taken

out or picked up in Assam whenever a sale is held, an event that occurs on the departure of an old planter when leaving the country. The retiring member sends out a list of all the goods to be disposed of, with prices opposite each article, and a space left against this, where the name of the would-be purchaser can be inscribed. The lists are issued two or three months before a man intends to leave, and contain usually an extraordinary collection of things got together at various sales or sent out direct from home. Some of the goods have been in the country for generations of planters, and, although they have seen much service, are now fetching as big a price as when they were first introduced. A list goes right round the district until most of the things are disposed of. Some of the poor fellows, suddenly ordered to leave the country for the benefit of their health, depend entirely on this sale of their goods and chattels to enable them to get back to England, and live there until better times shall permit them to return, or they can find other work to do.

In conclusion, let me give a bit of earnest advice to all men thinking of visiting the East. Be abstemious, and beware of stimulants in any quantity. Many unfortunate planters live miles away from a white man, buried in the jungle and out of the line of the main road, and only see a white woman once in two or three years. These are not very refining circumstances; and it is no wonder that, when struck down by fever, solitary and sick, they take to "pegs"

to drown their cares and regrets for the old country and its comforts. An abuse of stimulants will speedily shatter a man's constitution in the tropics. Leading this solitary life, the thoughts are too apt to wander homewards ; and it is only by sticking close to work, by keeping the body and mind actively employed, that a man can rid himself of violent attacks of the blues. Home-sickness is not an incentive to health or hard work. I remember one instance of an unhappy fellow, who had entirely mistaken his vocation when he came out to plant tea, to whom life out of England was only made endurable by the arrival of the mail. His calculations were all based on the number of days before the next mail could arrive, or from the last mail that had come in—a wretched, wasted existence. If the mail brought nothing for him, he would retire into his bungalow, shut himself in, and brood over his disappointment.

Finally, I ask all those who have friends in the East to write much and write oft. An Englishman who has not moved out of his own country, with all its advantages of a penny post, does not know what the weekly mail means to the poor exile, ten thousand miles away from home. How eagerly the letters are opened and the news devoured ! and what pleasure is derived from the sight of a friend's handwriting !

Remember that writing in Assam is conducted under most trying circumstances, for the planter cannot have much news, except of his daily work, and that he does not consider of sufficient interest to

enter into in his regular correspondence on account of the monotonous similarity of one day to another. Two or three thicknesses of stout blotting paper are kept constantly between the hand and the thin foreign writing paper during the agonies of composition, otherwise the paper would speedily be in a state of pulp. Bear in mind these drawbacks to writing, you that sit at home at ease, and do not expect an exchange of letters ; but out of a thankfulness for the different conditions under which a letter is written in a comfortable English room, continue to send out letters, illustrated papers, and amusing publications ; and accept my word for it that they will be always acceptable.

If, unhappily, my headquarters had been less pleasantly surrounded, and instead of living in the same bungalow with my wife and the best friend that I possess, I had been located twenty miles from my nearest neighbour, with nobody to talk with except the coolies, Assam would have been a horrible nightmare, nor would it have had a single kindly word from me.

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